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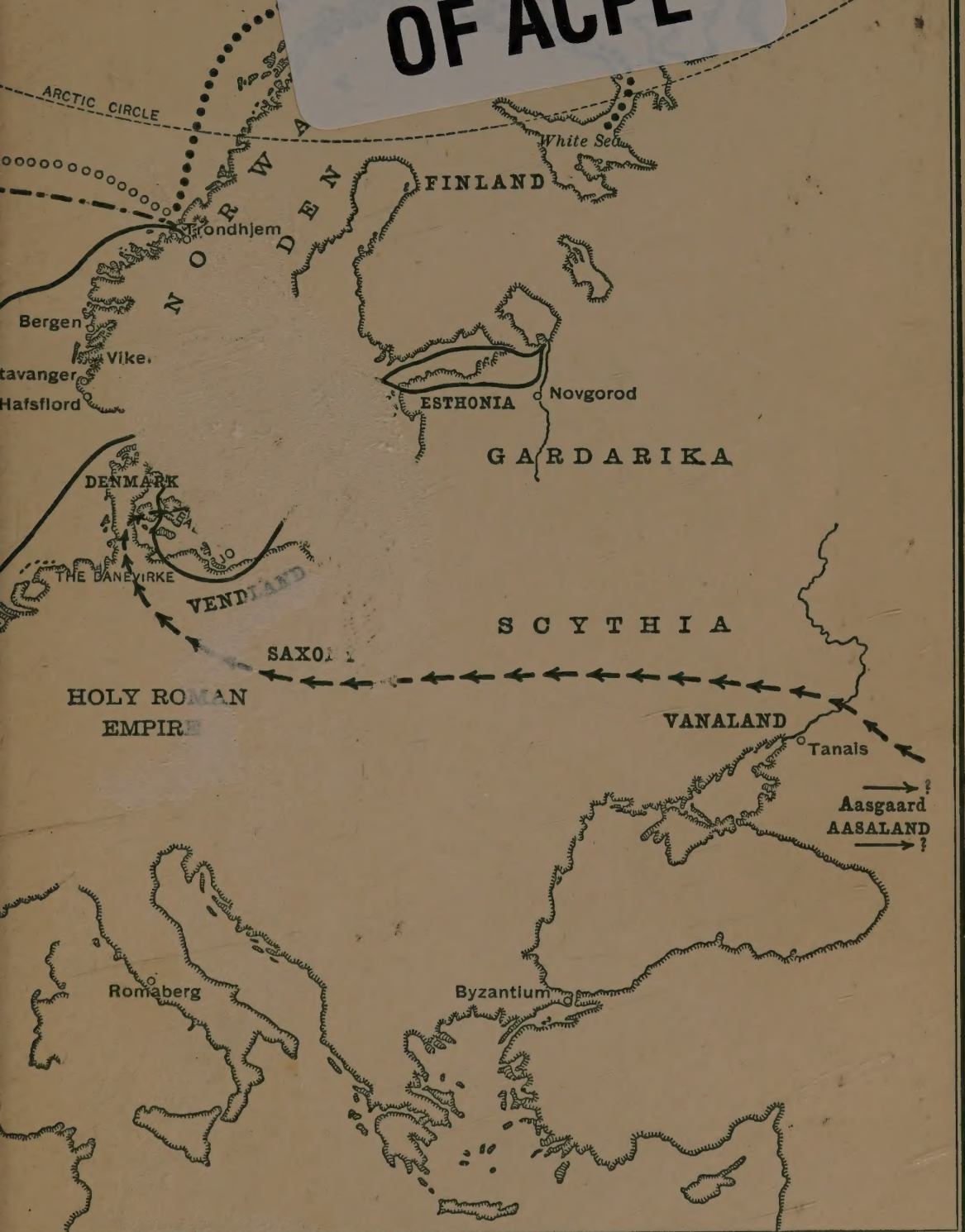
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# STORIES OF THE VIKINGS











Where there was a battle, he sought the thickest of the fight—Page 213



# STORIES OF THE VIKINGS

BY  
MAURICE DUNLAP

*Illustrated by*  
G. A. TENGGREN



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THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY  
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## THE TREASURE-HOUSE OF HEIMSKRINGLA

In the Middle Ages a wizard in Iceland built a treasure-house where he hid many wonderful things. In this treasure-house—he called it a book—may be found Viking life pulsating to-day as it did a thousand years ago. I bring you the key to its magic chambers.

Snorra, the wizard, is the royal singer for heroic Scandinavia as Homer was for heroic Greece. From ancient bits of Norse saga lore, Snorra spun a tale of kings and heroes. Heimskringla, the tale is called, and it is a pageant of vivid scenes, a living tapestry. The warp of the fabric is the legend of the Norsemen, their origin in the dim East, their development into a hardy noble race in the Far North. The woof of the fabric is the story of a super-human conflict, the Norse gods fighting to hold the faith of the people against a new Religion of Light.

Heimskringla is read and loved by every child of Norway. It is the most sacred heritage of his land; at school his text-book, at home his diversion, always his inspiration. He thrills as he follows the career of brave kings and heroes—*his* forefathers. He finds in Heimskringla a mine yield-

## STORIES OF THE VIKINGS

ing a wealth of romance, a mirror that has imprisoned the reflection of a vanished past. Heimskringla holds in its pages the joy of living, the glory of achievement, the best and noblest from a bygone age.

And so whether you are young in years, or young only in your interests, I ask you to open the covers for they are the doors to a labyrinth as glittering as any in the Arabian nights.

“And then the blue-eyed Norseman told  
A Saga of the days of old.  
‘There is,’ said he, ‘a wondrous book  
Of Legends in the old Norse tongue,  
Of the dead kings of Norroway—  
Legends that once were told or sung  
In many a smoky fireside nook  
Of Iceland, in the ancient day,  
By wandering Saga-man or Scald;  
*Heimskringla* is the volume called;  
‘And he who looks may find therein  
That story that I now begin.’ ”

From *The Saga of King Olaf* by Longfellow.



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# STORIES OF THE VIKINGS





# STORIES OF THE VIKINGS

## I

### THE SKALD FROM ICELAND

#### *How the Heimskringla Came to Be Written*

*Snorra*,<sup>1</sup> the Skald from Iceland

*Haakon the Great*, King of Norway

*Earl Skula*, Snorra's patron

*Jon*, Snorra's son

*Gissur*, Snorra's son-in-law

*Ingeborg*, Snorra's daughter

*Margaret*, Queen of Norway

PLACE: Iceland and Norway, especially the city of Bergen.

TIME: The early part of the thirteenth century.

“WHAT wonderful presents,” cried little Ingeborg, gazing with awe at the bright shield and coat of mail that had just come from Norway for Snorra, her father. Meanwhile her brother Jon tried in vain to lift the shining sword.

“You may be able to do that some day,” laughed Snorra. “You may try again to-morrow. But in the meantime you must be off, as I have verses to write to a great lady.”

As the children withdrew, casting longing glances at the glittering gifts, the father's eye again sought a letter lying on his writing-table, a letter just received from the earl who had sent the presents.

"I shall bring you to honor," he read from the letter, "for you have done honor to our family in your splendid poem. Pray accept these gifts as a token of our regard. My wife joins me in these greetings and begs that you address a few lines to her."

Recognition had come at last to Snorra, the skald. He had been born and bred in Iceland, that dim outpost where people of culture had come to escape from Europe's turmoil, just as later they came to the American continent. On that island of mists and saga-lore, Snorra had spent the long winter nights studying the legends his forefathers had brought from Norway. He himself became inspired and began to write after the manner of the older poets, retelling many of their tales. These stories he related for the amusement of his friends, and his fame as an entertainer had spread over Iceland. Now his voice had been heard even in Europe, beyond the gray ocean, for he had addressed verses to a great earl in Norway. And so came the letter with the gifts.<sup>2</sup>

"I shall bring you to honor," ran the letter, but little did Snorra or the youthful Jon or his sister Ingeborg realize that the name of Snorra would some day become immortal as the singer of the sagas of gods and hero-kings.

One autumn day, a sailboat rounded a barren promontory on Norway's coast and sailed into the



harbor of Bergen. On the deck stood Snorra, shading his eyes and gazing over toward the blue-gray mountains rising so sheer from the fiord that they seemed to threaten the little town with destruction. This was the land of his dreams,—Norway; where Snorra had come to seek his fortune, lured by the promises of a great earl.

Earl Skula, the most powerful nobleman in all the land, gave Snorra a cordial welcome, and invited many guests to his house to hear the brilliant skald who had just arrived from Iceland. His success was immediate. But greatest of all his admirers was a little girl of ten, Margaret, the rollicking, golden-haired daughter of the great earl, himself. Usually restless and capricious, dancing hither and thither like a golden elf, she sat spell-bound when Snorra began one of his wonder-tales. Snorra was touched by the devotion of his little listener; there was a look in the big blue eyes that carried him overseas, back to his homeland, where two young hearts, most dear to him, beat quicker when they heard of their father's success.

"I have good news," said Earl Skula to his guest one day. "You may know that our young King Haakon<sup>3</sup> and I have not always been friends. But now our differences have been settled and to bind our pact I have promised him my daughter Margaret."

"So Margaret will be Norway's queen?" ex-

claimed the poet, delighted at the thought of so much honor for his young admirer.

"Yes," replied the earl, "and the betrothal is soon to be announced, which will give me the opportunity to present you, my friend, at court!"

Snorra was more than pleased at the idea of meeting the famous young king and was glad that Margaret should some day be the greatest lady in the land,—perhaps more glad than Margaret herself. For what could such a little girl know of thrones, diplomats, audiences and intrigues,—or even whether she would fancy the royal suitor selected for her?

Ah, those were great days when Haakon Haakonson was king of Norway. It was the time of the fifth crusade; all Europe trembled with a fever of action as its youth went forth on strange quests under the sign of the Cross; it was the time when the Great Mogul in Asia was threatening to overrun Europe with his Tartar hordes. These world-movements reached Norway while Haakon was king. His knights played their parts as crusaders at Damietta; he gave shelter to many fugitives fleeing from the land of Gardarika, the ancient name for Russia, to escape the Great Mogul. And these were especially great days for Norway; planted in sturdy Viking soil, she was now blooming in medieval splendor. King Haakon was a ruler with ideas corresponding to the times. He



made his capital Bergen a city of stately buildings and encouraged men of genius at his court. It was he who built Haakon's Hall which stands to-day proud and splendid, a noble testimony to a greatness that has passed; and it was at his court that *The King's Mirror*<sup>4</sup> was written, a literary monument as noble as the hall itself, and it was Haakon who welcomed Snorra, the skald from Iceland and gave him his opportunity.

Yes, the young King Haakon welcomed Snorra with as much enthusiasm as Earl Skula had done, and the skald of Iceland was soon to become the idolized entertainer of one of the most cultured courts of Europe.

"We shall make you a knight!" cried the king enthusiastically one day. And Snorra became a knight and swore the oath of loyalty to Norway's king. Snorra had almost forgotten that Iceland and not Norway was his native land. Indeed he was, for the time, overwhelmed by the friendship shown him in Norway and did not remember that his forefathers had left that land because they could not agree with its rulers.

There was a frown on Margaret's brow one morning when she came to see her friend the poet and took his big hand between her small ones. She did not plead for a story as usual.

"What does my father mean when he whispers of war with Iceland?" she asked, looking up at

Snorra with perplexity in her blue eyes. "I thought Norway and Iceland were friends."

Poor little Margaret had much to learn about politics.

Snorra gripped the two small hands in his,—then dropped them. He did not dare to let this trusting child see his emotions.

"It must be a mistake," he said laughingly. "You know I am from Iceland and you can see what good friends I am with your father and the king."

But it was in a more serious mood that he went to his patron, the earl, to inquire into the cause of the trouble.

It was an unpleasant matter, and Snorra soon understood why Earl Skula had not mentioned it to him. A trader from Bergen had been so mistreated by certain men in Iceland that he died. This was not the first case of the kind. There had been bad feeling between the two communities for some time, and unfriendly acts on both sides had developed the affair into a feud. The last murder had been such a cold-blooded one that the whole of Bergen was enraged, and the king had been asked to take action against Iceland.

"It is a serious matter," said the earl, shaking his head. "We do not wish to take such a step, but the king has consulted me as to the sending of an army to Iceland to punish the offenders."

"I am most grateful to you, my Lord," replied Snorra, "for your many favors. But I must now ask a still greater favor than any you have granted. Pray allow this matter to go no further until you are sure there is no other way."

"You can perhaps suggest another way?" answered the earl.

Snorra considered.

"Let me go, myself," he said finally. "My relatives are powerful in Iceland and I have some influence, myself. I think I might be able to put an end to this unfortunate feud."

The matter was taken before the king; the king was persuaded in its favor, and Snorra was appointed as the royal envoy to Iceland to settle the dispute. Before his departure, he received additional honors from King Haakon, being declared a "citizen of Norway," appointed on the king's private council and granted royal lands. But Snorra promised much in return. For in his enthusiasm the skald offered to try to bring Iceland under the Norwegian crown. This was to be done by persuasion; there was no thought of treachery against his own people. He believed it would be for the best interest. As a pledge of his good faith, he promised to send his son, Jon, as a hostage to King Haakon. These agreements were made in the greatest secrecy. So Snorra returned to Iceland.



The joy of Jon and Ingeborg was unbounded at their father's return. Rumors of his success had already spread over the whole island, but now they were to hear at first hand about life at the brilliant Bergen court, King Haakon and his brave knights, Earl Skula and the pretty little Margaret who soon would be Norway's queen.

"It is all so wonderful; I should like to see it for myself!" cried Jon.

"If you would really like to go to Norway," said his father, "then I shall try to arrange it with the king." For this was just what Snorra had promised.

Thus it happened that Jon, now a tall boy of seventeen, came to the court of Haakon the Great. He did not know that he went a living pledge of his father's promise to try to bring Iceland under Norway's rule.

About this time, the main leader in the feud with the Bergen merchants died, and Snorra found it rather easy to secure promises that there would be no further trouble from Iceland's side. Satisfactory assurances were sent to King Haakon and the Bergen people; and thus Snorra settled the dispute.

But there was still the secret agreement. The more the skald thought over his promise—and the vast silences of Iceland gave him opportunity for plenty of thought—the less he liked the idea of

even suggesting that his countrymen give up their republic and come under the Norwegian crown. But how could he explain his hesitation to King Haakon and Earl Skula? Snorra was a busy man and interested in many things, but he always gave much time to his writing. One day an inspiration came to him.

"At last I have found a way to show my gratitude to King Haakon," he explained to his daughter Ingeborg. "I shall make such a song about Norway and its noble line of kings as was never before written. My preface will run something like this," he continued, reading from a parchment on which he had jotted it down: "In this tale I will sing the ancient legends of the chiefs who have ruled in the Northland. I shall collect songs and stories from the most trustworthy sources and to these I shall add my own knowledge. It shall be the royal epic of Norway, written in the Danish tongue."<sup>5</sup>

"A fine idea!" agreed Ingeborg. "What shall you call the saga?"

"I think I shall call it, *The Saga of the Sons of Frey*," answered the poet. "For I will show how King Haakon's line comes direct from the mighty Frey, whom our ancestors considered a god."

Now it happened that Snorra had another work already finished, called *Edda*<sup>6</sup> and this he sent to

his son Jon to deliver to the king, while he himself continued to work on *The Saga of the Sons of Frey*.

Jon had now been in Bergen, attached to the royal court, for about two years. He knew that the king awaited news from his father, so it was with pleasure that he told him of the receipt of *Edda*. It was at once arranged that Jon should read the new work aloud in public for the king and his council—a most dignified occasion. Earl Skula was there with his daughter, the golden-haired Margaret, now a budding young woman of fifteen, but still unmarried. All waited eagerly to learn what message had come from the famous skald.

“A new hero tale!” thought Margaret.

“A hint as to affairs in Iceland?” suggested King Haakon to his right-hand nobleman, Earl Skula. The latter shook his head.

“Edda sounds too dull and scholarly,” he replied.

In ringing tones, the nineteen-year-old son of Snorra began to read. It was soon evident that he had inherited his father’s dramatic genius. Reading from the parchment, Jon first announced that the art of being a skald would be explained. This was a subject of interest in those days when there were no printed books and the people were dependent on the skald for their literary entertain-



ment. But this was not all. This master-skald in explaining his craft took occasion to spin the most delightful romances. The assembly was spell-bound, and none more than the fair Margaret who felt that she sat again at her old friend's knee, following his lively fancy through a dream-world of heroes. The king and Skula were less pleased, for they were more interested in Iceland politics than in verse-making.

Having discussed the use of words, Jon's recital explained the different forms of writing poetry, and here the real genius of Snorra was shown. For in explaining one form, he indited a poem to the bravery of King Haakon the Great; in explaining another, he retold complimentary tales about Earl Skula; in a third instance, he described Haakon's valiant knights and their deeds of prowess; in a fourth, the delightful life at that monarch's court. And then came a well-worded expression of Snorra's loyalty to the king and a grateful appreciation of Norwegian hospitality.

"Masterfully done!" exclaimed Haakon to Jon who glowed with pride at the success of the entertainment. Earl Skula could not but agree that it was a worthy tribute, and not less pleasing to the young orator were the smile and nod from Margaret, Norway's future queen. Jon was now a marked figure for the king's favor as his father had been. He was no longer regarded as a hostage

and when he expressed a wish to visit Iceland, no objections were made.

Jon found many changes, when he returned home. His father was now Iceland's foremost citizen. He had been elected Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the highest position in the republic.<sup>7</sup> Jon's sister, Ingeborg, had given her hand to a powerful young chieftain named Gissur and this match was considered an additional honor for the poet-statesman. Snorra had reached the zenith of his career. Little did he realize how soon his glory would wane.

Meanwhile another wedding had taken place which aroused even greater interest than Ingeborg's, that of the charming Margaret, who had come to know and respect her intended husband. She had been promised to Haakon without being asked,—that was reason for *not* liking him, to be sure,—but she was far too sensible not to see his good qualities, for he showed every courtesy and kindness to his intended bride, and so, finally, it came to be a real love match after all!

Lucky young couple! In their marriage, yes. But this did not keep them from a great unhappiness, a misfortune brought upon them by the very one who had planned for their happiness. Margaret's father, Earl Skula, was of a jealous nature and as he grew older he became more and more envious. He felt that he should be king of Nor-

way and the popularity of his daughter's husband only vexed him. As the years went by, every now and then some little word or act showed that Skula's loyalty to his king was wavering. The latter tried to appease his father-in-law. Honors were heaped upon him, but so long as the greatest honor was denied, the discontented earl could find no peace. Margaret saw with dismay the rift growing between her father and her husband.

On a dark November evening in Bergen, King Haakon first received the dreaded news: Earl Skula had revolted and proclaimed himself king of Norway. The young king sat in silence for some time, then he went to the queen's apartments and asked to see her.<sup>8</sup>

It was late. The ladies-in-waiting were asleep but a faint light was still burning. The king hastened to the queen's bedside. The beautiful Margaret, clad in a sleeping-gown of soft silk, was about to retire, but when she saw Haakon she threw a scarlet cloak about her shoulders and hastened to him. In an instant her eyes reflected the doubt and distress in his, though she did not question him at once. Man and wife they were, indeed, and loved each other as fondly as any couple of more lowly origin, but he was king and she was queen.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked.

He shook his head.



And then, "You have perhaps received important news?" she ventured.

"Nothing very important except that there are now two kings in Norway."

"Oh," cried the woman—the unhappy daughter, hiding her face in her hands. Then the wife, and the queen, spoke.

"There is only one rightful king in Norway," she said, stretching her hands toward him. "And that is you! God and Saint Olaf grant that it may always be so."

Haakon took her in his arms. Then he told her the details as he had heard them,—how her father had called an assembly and how the assembly had proclaimed him king.

And so the daughter spoke: "As you love me," she cried, "believe this not of my father, until you know it to be true!"

The young king held her still closer in his arms.

"Dear Margaret," he whispered, "it is hardest of all for you. But I know that whatever happens, you are first *my* wife, and true."

To which Margaret breathed assent in a kiss. Her kind husband was still both her lover and her king.

Strangely enough, a woman in Iceland had meanwhile undergone trials similar to Queen Margaret's and had been forced to choose between husband and father. Ingeborg's husband, the chief-

tain Gissur, had become so jealous of the great skald's influence that he was secretly trying to undermine his power. But Ingeborg believed her husband was in the wrong and left him to return to her father's house. Snorra, however, preferred to avoid a conflict, although he was aware of Gissur's unfriendliness; thus there came no open breach between father and son-in-law. And Snorra continued to be Iceland's mightiest man.

News had come to King Haakon of Norway of Snorra's growing influence. He felt that Snorra could now, if he would, fulfill his promise to bring Iceland under the crown of Norway, but there were no indications of any such intention on Snorra's part. The latter expected that Haakon would some day refer to the old promise, but now his masterwork, *The Saga of the Sons of Frey*, was almost completed. When that should be read aloud at court, it would surely serve to postpone the day of reckoning. However, Snorra no longer had his promising young son to present his work. Jon had returned to Norway, it is true, but had been killed in a duel.

"Snorra swore loyalty to you, but he is shaping power only for himself," suggested a wily courtier to King Haakon.

"He calls the new meeting hall, Valhalla, and one can guess that *he* is acting the part of Odin," insinuated another.

King Haakon hesitated to think that Snorra would deliberately play him false. But what about the promise?

"Do not listen to their hints," protested Queen Margaret. "These flatterers are merely jealous of your esteem for Snorra, our good friend. Oh, why is there so much jealousy wherever one turns?"

And now comes the most terrible blow of all, Earl Skula's disloyalty. Already there have been rumors that Snorra sympathizes with the earl. Margaret herself must admit that Snorra's connections have been closer with her father than with her husband, the king. Earl Skula's men are coming into all parts of Norway, trying to arouse the people and burning and pillaging where they meet with resistance.

"It is true!" cries the king one day, rushing excitedly into his wife's apartment. "Your father has promised to make Snorra earl of Iceland. If treachery to our crown is to be stamped out, both must die."

"Send for Snorra yourself," pleads the fair Margaret. "Give him a chance to explain away these rumors, if he can."

"Very well," answers the angry king. "I shall send for him. But if he does not come, it shall be his death."

Shortly after, Gissur in Iceland received a secret letter from King Haakon. It appointed him a



royal envoy and bade him have Snorra sent back to Norway or murdered.

Earl Skula's rebellion was a failure. The too-ambitious nobleman was surrounded, his troops disbanded and he himself paid the final penalty, being slain in the defense of a lost cause. Peace was restored in Norway and the king, more beloved by his people than ever, had nothing more to fear. But over in Iceland, the false Gissur still felt that he had a mission and resolved to carry it out, whether or no.

One day Snorra received a strange letter. He could not discover from whence it came, but its message was: "Be on your guard!"

Snorra was already on his guard. The general hatred of Gissur, fanned into flame by King Haakon's commission, had lighted other fires. Other ambitious Icelandic politicians, jealous of the famous poet-statesman, were easily persuaded that Snorra was using foul means to keep his power. So Snorra quietly left his estate and sought the home of good friends who lived on a remote farm. From there he hoped to make connections with his different enemies and convince them of his honesty.

Gissur, however, did not wish to be convinced. He did not wish to send Snorra back to Norway where that master of words could undoubtedly win back the royal favor. Queen Margaret might wait

day after day or week after week for the return of her childhood friend,—that was a matter that did not concern Gissur. Instead, the crafty Ice-lander sought out the hiding-place of the skald, and one night Snorra's former friends discovered that their house was surrounded by an armed force.

"In the name of King Haakon of Norway, I demand speech with Snorra," announced Gissur.

But Snorra was not there.

In those times, folk in danger often sought refuge in a church. No sin was greater than the desecration of a holy spot by murder, so that even notorious sinners sometimes escaped judgment by retiring to some sanctuary. Gissur knew this and proceeded to a chapel near the farm.

"Bid Snorra come out!" commanded Gissur of the priest.

"Can not you and Snorra come to an understanding?" suggested the latter timidly.

"Bid him come out," thundered Gissur. "How can there be an understanding, if we do not meet?"

"Snorra is here," replied the priest, stepping aside, "but remember these walls are holy."

"Strike him down!" cried Gissur, the tyrant.

"You dare not strike!" answered Snorra with equal spirit, advancing toward his oppressors.

He stood there defenseless but without fear.

There was something awe-inspiring in the dignity of that stalwart figure with flashing eyes and flowing white hair. No one would touch him.

"Strike!" repeated Gissur; this time to his own slave. And the slave struck. There was no resistance. In a moment the venerable figure lay at their feet, quite still.

Snorra was dead.

The news of the death of the master-skald came to the court of Norway along with a sealed packet addressed to King Haakon in Snorra's handwriting. In the packet was the work which Snorra had been writing for so many years and had just finished for his king—*The Saga of the Sons of Frey*.

"Snorra is dead; Snorra is dead," repeated Queen Margaret slowly. Her thoughts went back through the years; she was a child again, a rollicking, thoughtless, golden-haired girl, begging her kind friend for "one story more." Before her lay the manuscript; here was a feast of stories, old and new, but Queen Margaret could not read them. Her tears were falling and blotting the fair pages.

"Poor Margaret," whispered King Haakon, laying his hand on her shoulder. "I had hoped that he would come, but now it is too late."

"Snorra is dead," repeated Margaret, "but his memory shall live as long as these rock-bound



coasts are Norway. May the fame of our friend ring down the years and his tales bring joy to the unborn thousands that will learn to love him as I have loved him.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In Icelandic the name Snorra is spelled "Snorri" but pronounced more like Snorra. Other proper names in these tales are simplified or slightly altered to indicate a more correct pronunciation.

<sup>2</sup>A scholar known as Saxo Grammaticus lived at this time in Denmark and in his introduction to a celebrated collection of tales he makes this tribute to the lore of Iceland: "Nor must I pass over in silence the industry of the Icelanders. The barrenness of their country makes them conservative by nature and they spend much time collecting the knowledge of other peoples, enriching their own physical poverty by developing spiritual gifts. Their treasure chambers filled with priceless lore from the past have been carefully ransacked and I am not ashamed to acknowledge my debt for not a little that I have taken for my own work, because I know how wise they are as to the events of bygone ages."

About six centuries later, in 1841, Thomas Carlyle makes a similar tribute: "In that strange island, Iceland,—burst-up, the geologists say, by fire from the bottom of the sea; a wild land of barrenness and lava; swallowed many months of every year in black tempests, yet with a wild gleaming beauty in the summer-time; towering up there, stern and grim, in the North Ocean; with its snow jokuls, roaring geysers, sulphur-pools and horrid volcanic chasms, like the waste chaotic battle-field of Frost and Fire—where of all places we least looked for literature or written memorials, the record of these things was written down. On the seaboard of this wild land is a rim of grassy country, where cattle can subsist, and men by means of

them and of what the sea yields; and it seems they were poetic men these, men who had deep thoughts in them, and uttered musically their thoughts. Much would be lost, had Iceland not been burst-up from the sea, not been discovered by the Northmen!"—From *On Heroes and Hero Worship*.

<sup>3</sup>Haakon is pronounced Ho-kon. The Scandinavian *aa* is one letter, the nearest equivalent in English being *o*; in fact the Scandinavians themselves in some words now substitute the one for the other.

<sup>4</sup>"One of the most important and interesting works in Old Norse literature, published anonymously. It is in the form of a dialogue between father and son in which the author planned to describe the education, culture and manners of society."—*History of the Norwegian People*, by Gjerset.

<sup>5</sup>Thus runs Snorra's own preface to the *Heimskringla* as we have it to-day. One of the most noteworthy features of his work is that he wrote it "in the Danish tongue." No work in those days was universally acknowledged unless it was written in Latin. Snorra's contemporary in Denmark, the monk Saxo, wrote in Latin. Snorra's wisdom in choosing his own language—the common speech of all the Far North was then known as Danish—is more evident to-day than at the time he dared to take the new step. Saxo's stories have their charm, but the modern student following his involved, flowing sentences regrets that he did not use his own language. The pithy, concise style of Snorra's writings is in direct contrast to Saxo's. The mere fact that they are written in "Danish" seems to improve the tales, it seems to have been easier for Snorra to find the right words to suit the right ideas.

The "Danish" which Snorra used had been one of Europe's most important languages. When England was under Danish rule (in the early part of the eleventh century) the languages of the two countries were practically the same—the speech

generally used wherever the Norsemen had established their dominion.

"Indeed our English blood, too, in good part, is Danish-Norse," says Carlyle, "or rather at bottom, Danish and Norse and Saxon have no distinction, except a superficial one,—as of heathen or Christian. But all over our Island we are mingled largely with Danes proper. . . . All over Scotland, the speech of the common people is still in a singular degree Icelandic."

"The first missionaries to Norway came from England, where the gospel was preached, not in the Latin church language commonly used at that time, but in the people's own tongue," says Dr. Knut Gjerset in his *History of the Norwegian People*.

That students to-day still study Icelandic in order to read Snorra in the original is certainly a tribute both to the skald and the language.

<sup>6</sup>This work is now known as the *Younger Edda* to distinguish it from the *Elder Edda*, an earlier collection of Icelandic poems. *Edda* has been thought to mean "Great-grandmother," in the sense that the work was the great-grandmother of poetry, but the true meaning would seem to be "*Skald-Craft or the Art of Composition*." Snorra's so-called *Younger Edda* is not only one of the world's literary masterpieces, but the only work of its kind.

<sup>7</sup>This was a life position. Snorra's dramatic talents also served him here, as a picturesque duty of this office was the public recitation of the laws before the assembly (the *al-thing*). The analogy between Snorra's position and that of our own Chief Justice is striking and is another evidence of the advanced culture of Iceland in certain directions at this early period. The *al-thing* dates back to 930.

<sup>8</sup>This is one of the famous scenes in the romantic period of



Norway's history, vividly told in the *Saga of Haakon Haakonson*, which was written shortly afterward. The story of the strife between Haakon the Great and Earl Skula also gave Ibsen a theme for his best historical drama—*Kongs-Emnerne*—1863. The pathetic figure of Margaret, torn between the emotions of wife and daughter, furnishes a heroine worthy of Norway's greatest dramatist.

Snorra is still a living figure in Norway, and especially in Iceland. He is in fact the greatest man ever produced by that dim island of the Far North. He is to Icelanders what Benjamin Franklin is to Americans—a writer, a statesman, a politician, a diplomat, an inventor. Snorra built a bath-house on his estate applying scientific principles to the regulation of the flow from a hot spring and this bath still exists to attest the wisdom of the builder.

Gustav Storm's Norwegian edition of *Snorra* gives a complete and scholarly description of this master-skald and his works. It is a book especially designed for the children of Norway and can be had for a nominal price. In the preface, attention is drawn to the historical value of Snorra's work as follows:

"Snorra's work is a collection of biographies with fine descriptions of character. A special point is the clever composition where everything irrelevant is kept out and every detail belongs to the whole. His collection of biographies of the kings of Norway has thus become the *history of a race* where every single figure stands out as a personality. In contrast to his predecessors, Snorra in describing his main actors (the kings) includes a great number of secondary characters, but only when they help to form the frame around the main figure without distracting the interest from him. His most important method of presenting his characters is in letting them speak for themselves. In his conversations every word

seems inspired by the character of the speaker, although they are naturally entirely the work of Snorra."

Regarding Snorra's politics, there is this interesting comment in the preface: "There is no doubt that Snorra deliberately wrote into some of the best of his work, a number of speeches where he indirectly opposes the king of Norway's plan against Iceland."

## II

# THE WONDER-PRINCE FROM AASGAARD

<i>Odin</i> , the Wonder-Prince	<i>Tor</i>	}chieftains
<i>Frey</i> , hostage and warrior priest	<i>Skiold</i>	
	<i>Gylfa</i> , a king in Sweden	
<i>Mimer</i> , the wise	<i>Svegda</i> , Frey's grandson	
<i>Heyner</i>	<i>Freya</i> , hostage and priestess	
	<i>Gefion</i> , a warrior-maiden	

PLACE: The city of Aasgaard; later northern Europe.

### THE SEARCH FOR THE NORTHLAND

**L**ONG ago there lay to the east, a shining city with spires and minarets towering so high above the mighty battlements that they seemed to pierce the sky itself. The city was called Aasgaard<sup>1</sup> and its ruler, Prince Odin, was known far and wide as a warrior and magician. Brave was Odin, leader of the Aasa folk, brave and wise; and so great was his wisdom in the Things of the Unseen World that it was said he used magic to protect his people from their enemies.

The worst enemy of the Aasa folk were the men of Vanaland, a kingdom on the River Don, where it flows into the Black Sea. Wild and warlike were the sons of Vanaland, but they had no gleaming city like Aasgaard and it vexed them to hear continually of the glories of something they could



not possess. Travelers sung its praises; caravans trailing over the desert brought the choicest wares to sell in its broad market-places; holy men journeyed long distances to see the sacrifices which the people of Aasa made to the Sun, for Aasgaard was famous as a sacred city.<sup>2</sup>

The Vana folk themselves were awed by the splendor of Aasgaard. High on a hill it stood like a tempting Paradise and up and down its causeway the day long went a ceaseless throng,—the haughty, god-like Aasa folk. At festival times signs of religious ceremonials were seen above the walls, smoke by day, fire by night—and then the men and women of Vana knew that the twelve warrior-priests sung their chants while the offerings were being made and the priestesses read the runes or moved in mystic circles round the shrine.

Of an evening the portals of the city—massive gates of iron wrought with gold—would fly open and over the fields would ride the warrior maidens. Their golden hair flowed loose from under their golden winged helmets; their white horses seemed to tread on air; their shields and spears glistened like lightning, and their war-cry echoed from their fair throats. For the daughters of this virile race were trained in the arts of war as well as those of peace and could stand shoulder to shoulder with their stalwart brothers to defend the

honor of their city and fight for Odin, their Wonder-Prince.<sup>3</sup>

Thus it happened that the people of Vanaland envied the people of Aasgaard so much that they formed an expedition and sallied forth to take the city. Prince Odin had previously commanded an army against the aggressive Vana folk, but this attack was as unexpected as it was overpowering. All the magical charms he had formerly used to defend his capital seemed unavailing against new wizards that followed with the Vanaland army. The enemy were in the act of scaling the walls!

"Ah," thought Odin, "if I were only ten men—or a hundred—or as many as my whole army, indeed—even now there would be hope."

He then resolved to make a supreme test of his powers. Standing on the lofty stairway of his palace<sup>4</sup> he ordered his soldiers to pass by in single file and as they obeyed him he laid his hand on each head. Suddenly each man found himself braver and stronger than before, just as though each had received in that touch a bit of Odin's own irresistible self.<sup>5</sup> Rushing to the battlements, they renewed the defense so boldly that the Vana soldiers, startled, began to withdraw. The result was a complete victory for the Aasa.

Odin offered the defeated enemy favorable peace conditions and each nation agreed to send hostages to the other as a pledge of good faith.

It was agreed, further, that the very best men from each side should be sent, and thus Vanaland offered one of their most valiant warriors, a stalwart young fellow with fair hair and flashing eyes; his name was Frey. His sister, Freya, a handsome and brilliant young woman, was also sent. They were of one of the wealthiest and most powerful families of Tanais, the capital of Vanaland.<sup>6</sup> In return, Odin sent as hostages, Aasgaard's wisest man and her handsomest man, whose names were Mimer and Heyner.

The people of Vana were especially impressed with Heyner and they made him a judge in Tanais. Here his decisions were so wise that all Vanaland heard of them and the most difficult problems were brought him for solution. Mimer, however, really made the decisions, and when he did not happen to be present and a decision was asked for, Heyner would look around and not finding his wise companion, would say, "Some one else will have to decide this."

This could perhaps have been thought a clever answer, if it had happened only once, but it happened more than once, and always when Mimer was away. When the people finally discovered that they had been referring important questions to a stranger who was really not wise, they became angry and blamed Odin for their own stupidity. They could very well show that they could decide



their own questions without referring them to hostages from another nation! And to show how independent they felt, they cut off the head of the real wise man, Mimer, and sent it to Prince Odin.

The people of Aasgaard were most incensed when Mimer's head was received and some of them wanted to cut off the heads of Frey and Freya as a return compliment. But not so, Odin. He knew that such an act would only bring back the old state of uncertainty, he also had been much impressed by the nobility of this brother and sister whom the enemy had sent him. So he called a meeting of the people in the broad square before his palace. Something unusual was certainly about to happen. On a pedestal he placed Mimer's head which he had preserved in herbs. The priests and priestesses began a sacred chant and Odin started to move slowly around the pedestal, making passes with his hands and repeating strange verses.

He paused. The singers were silent. Every one waited in suspense . . . as the head of Mimer opened its eyes, then its lips. Yes, the bodiless head of the wise man actually spoke and what it said was more astonishing than anything that had ever been heard before in that sacred city.

"There is an enemy," said the sepulchral voice, "more to be feared than the citizens of Vanaland. These are the people that live in Romaborg,<sup>7</sup> who

are trying to conquer the world. Many are fleeing from these terrible people—and they that flee are the most lucky. If the Aasa folk do not wish to be slaves they must seek another home, for Aasgaard will tempt Romaborg as it did Vanaland.”

The people looked at one another, awe-struck, and then turned to Odin, awaiting his advice. The Wonder-Prince summoned the hostage Frey before him.

“We have reached a crisis,” said Odin, “where we need leaders brave and strong. We could easily send Frey back to Vanaland as Mimer was returned to us, but now we have the wisdom of Mimer again and can well find use for the valor of Frey. Frey shall not return to Vanaland; he shall be one of us hereafter. As a proof of confidence, I hereby make him one of our warrior priests to lead our people and add to our knowledge the best of what he has learned in Vanaland.”

The young warrior bowed in acknowledgment of his gratitude; the people were silent. This was not in accord with the customs they knew but they trusted their leader Odin. Freya was then summoned by Odin and given a place among the priestesses, being admonished to teach the women of Assgaard the best of what she had learned in Vanaland. Finally Odin stated that the words of Mimer had been so startling that he felt he must

himself make a journey abroad to determine their meaning.

Because of his knowledge of magic, Odin could travel much more easily than ordinary folk. His ship was the strangest ever seen, and a most convenient one, for when not in use, it could be rolled up like a carpet and carried under the arm. Many times it was more convenient to make short trips in disguise and then Odin could leave his body which seemed to be sleeping and travel as a fish, a bird, a snake or some other animal.<sup>8</sup> His people knew this, and, therefore, when he left them and years went by without his returning, they thought he must be dead. As he had taken the head of Mimer with him, the Aasa folk felt that they had lost their best advisers.

But Odin was not dead. Without warning he appeared one fine day at the portal of Aasgaard, and the enthusiastic populace flocked around him as he made his way to his palace. From the lofty stairway he addressed them, and every one listened intently to the words that flowed from his lips. Prince Odin had a habit of speaking in verse and what he said was not unlike this:

"I come from a wonderful journey;

To the west through the grim, gray mountains  
And over the vast plains of Scythia

I came farther north, to an ocean.



I found there a land with a future—  
Deep valleys quite uncultivated;  
A stern land, perhaps, but a free one—  
No Romans shall hold it in bondage.

This Northland I now wish to give you;  
Come, follow me out and possess it;  
To linger too long may mean slavery—  
A terrible fate threatens Aasgaard!"

Yes, Odin, the Wonder-Prince, was advising his people to leave their shining city and follow him across unknown wastes in search of a new promised land. The place was alive with excitement and many families refused to consider such a pilgrimage, but in the end, the larger part of the inhabitants decided to follow their leader on his journey.

The pilgrims were arranged in twelve divisions, each division being commanded by a warrior-priest. The fair-haired Frey from Vanaland had now won the respect of all the Aasa folk and he was second only to Odin. Stalwart and powerful he was, his clear blue eyes gleamed with the fire of inspiration, his whole person glowed with a spiritual as well as a physical strength that invited the trust of his fellows. A fitting leader he was indeed.

Another warrior-priest was Tor, a swarthy red-bearded chieftain. Others were Balder, Heimdal and Skiold.<sup>9</sup> And Freya led the warrior maids on

their white horses. A wonderful company it was that streamed out of Aasgaard's portals—legion upon legion—that eventful day—down the causeway and out, out across the plains, toward the dim Unknown.

Thus the pilgrimage in search of the Northland began. Westward the armies swept, and still westward. Those were weary plains, those stretches known as Scythia. Gardarika was a gray melancholy land. The years went by. Now it was a more attractive country where these nomads pitched their tents; in Saxony many found the land to their liking and weary of wandering made new homes there. But Odin, his twelve chieftains and great numbers of his people still kept on.

Their belief in their Wonder-Prince was not in vain. One day the great blue ocean that Odin had so often told them about, lay before them. Just across a narrow channel from the shore, was a smiling, green-clad island.

"Over there," cried Odin, "we shall make our home."<sup>10</sup>

And the long pilgrimage was ended.

#### GEFION'S PLOW

"Gefion, Gefion, where are you going with those four oxen and the big plow?"

"I'm going to Sweden, to plow me a piece of land," answers Gefion, cracking her whip.

And Gylva, King of Sweden, was more than sorry she came; for she plowed the best of his land away. This is how it happened:

Skiold, son of Odin, was in love with the warrior-maiden Gefion,<sup>11</sup> but Odin would not let them marry as he said he had no home to give them, the island being already over-filled with the people that had followed him from Aasgaard.

"If we only had an island all our own," sighed Skiold.

"Well," said Gefion, the warrior maid, "there is plenty of land. See what fine meadows and woodland the king of Sweden has. I think I shall go over to King Gylva and see if he will not do something for us."

King Gylva had heard about the wandering Aasa folk, and he feared the might and magic of their Wonder-Prince. However, he felt that he must treat them with courtesy as they might otherwise harm him. Therefore, when Gefion stood before him like a stalwart amazon, stating that she came from Odin and that she was looking for land, Gylva inquired very respectfully why she wanted it.

"I wish to plow it," answered Gefion.

Gylva invited Gefion to follow him and they came upon a hill where Gylva stopped and pointed out over a beautiful stretch of country.

"If you can plow across that land a furrow so



deep that water will flow into it and separate it from the rest of my kingdom, you may have it all."

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Gefion thanked the king and withdrew; and the king thought himself very clever for having got rid of her so easily. Meanwhile the warrior maiden returned to Skiold and Odin and told them what had happened, and Odin brought out the head of Mimer to which he often referred serious problems and asked for advice.

"Have you not a son?" asked Mimer's head of Gefion.

"Yes," she answered, "I have four."

You see, Gefion had once inspired the admiration of a giant who carried her off to his home in the snowy mountains of Jotunheim. There she lived a number of years during which time she bore the giant four sons, but finally she was able to make her escape and brought her little boys to Denmark. "Little" is hardly the word to describe them for they soon grew to be so large that there was hardly room for them on Odin's island, and they were so ugly and mean that every one was afraid of them. So the wisdom of Mimer's answer is plain.

"The best thing to do," said Mimer's head, "is to change your big, ugly sons into oxen. Then get Odin to make you a magic plow and you will be able to win the land Gylva offers you."

If Odin had not been a magician, the advice of Mimer would have been of little use, but Odin's powers seemed to grow greater every day. If he himself could become a bird, a snake or a fish when he liked, why could he not make other people into oxen? Many incantations were necessary, with passes and other mystical rites when—marvelous to behold—the giant sons of Gefion became four huge beasts of burden. A sigh of relief went up from the people in Denmark for they were glad to get rid of such uncomfortably big boys. Meanwhile a magic plow had been conjured up by Odin, which fitted the oxen exactly.

Once more Gefion, the warrior maiden, came to King Gylva. But she came in quite another fashion, for she drove an enormous plow which four monsters pulled over sea and land, tramping and snorting, as if it made no difference to them where they went. The land shook as though there was an earthquake and King Gylva nearly tumbled off his throne.

"By all means begin plowing at once!" he exclaimed when Gefion swung up to the palace, cracking a mighty whip.

So Gefion plowed. And how those huge oxen worked, pawing and straining until smoke and flames poured from their nostrils, their heavy tails beat the air into a whirlwind, so that a cloud of earth and water flew around them until it dark-

ened the sun. Thus you can understand that a furrow soon lay across the land so deep that the sea flowed in and separated it from the rest of Gylva's kingdom. Gefion had triumphed.

But the oxen did not stop. They kept right on out into the water, Gefion holding them tightly with the reins, and after them floated the land, separated by the deep furrow, until, entirely surrounded by water, it formed an island.

"I am losing the best part of my kingdom!" lamented King Gylva, as the island floated farther and farther away.

But Gylva's loss was Gefion's gain; Skiold and the warrior maiden could now marry, as they owned a whole province where their children and their children's children could live and multiply. They built a beautiful capital on the island called Leidra. Leidra has long since been a name only,<sup>12</sup> but the sons of Skiold and Gefion have been kings of Denmark ever since.

The new island was called Zealand. The place where it had been filled up with water and became a lake. They say that the points of land which make Zealand's coast line still correspond to the inlets of the lake.<sup>13</sup>

#### THE PASSING OF ODIN

Prince Odin's new home in the Northland had become too small for the continually increasing



Aasa folk. Gefion and Skiold had indeed been lucky in finding new estates. Their success inspired other young couples to look with longing eyes toward the kingdom of Gylva; perhaps there was also land over yonder for *them*.

So it came to pass that Odin's people and Gylva's people had disagreements. And these disagreements resulted in each side trying to outwit the other. The contests, however, always ended badly for Gylva's side for the Aasa people were the more clever. Once it became a question of weapons, but Odin's men went against their enemy as though neither fire nor iron could harm them and their foes actually became blind and deaf with fear while their swords seemed like so many straws. Especially did the person of Odin himself awe his opponents. When leading his army, mounted on a fiery steed, he seemed the embodiment of fierceness and destruction, but when he sat in conference and reasoned with them, he fascinated them with his charm. Finally Gylva concluded that this was a man one should much rather have as a friend than an enemy and he actually invited Odin to come to Sweden to live, bringing as many followers as he liked.

In Sweden were mighty stretches of untouched land, fair lakes glistening among wooded hills, forbidding mountains hiding charming dales behind their high gray walls, rushing rivers where trout

and salmon played. Here indeed seemed room for all, for Gylva's settlements were nothing more than a fringe on the wilderness.

Again the legions of Odin were in motion, the red-bearded Tor leading his group of fighters, Freya with her priestesses and warrior maids on their white horses, and the god-like Frey, second only to the Wonder-Prince himself. There was place for them all; they spread over the land which seemed to blossom anew under their magic touch. On a wide plain a new capital was built. It was not quite such a fine city as Aasgaard, but resembled it in many ways, especially as a sacred city. The walls of a new temple rose and here smoke by day and fire by night gave hint of the sacrifices over which Freya now presided as head priestess. The name of the new city was Upsala.<sup>14</sup>

But there came a time when Odin must take a journey where the others could not follow. He called to his bedside, Frey and Freya, the brother and sister who had followed him on so many of his wanderings, and spoke as follows:

"I have always been a wanderer," said Odin. "Sometimes I have taken my body with me, but sometimes I have made my journeys in spirit, returning to my body later on. I am now preparing for a journey in the spirit, but I shall leave my body with you and I want you to mark it with a spear-point as a sign for my followers."

"What is the meaning of this sign?" asked Frey.

"It will mean," answered the Wonder-Prince, "that all brave men who fall in the fight shall follow me to the home of the gods where I am now going. There I shall welcome them in my palace of Valhalla and I shall also find a place for you, my friends, when you take the same journey. Meanwhile, Frey, you must rule the land. A mighty race of kings will spring from you. Freya's name shall also be long respected and I trust you both to keep up the rites and customs of Aasgaard among my people."

Odin's body lay quite still. It was plain that his spirit had departed on its last great quest. With bowed heads, the brother and sister went from the silent chamber. Outside the populace had assembled to learn the latest news about their leader, and Frey gave them Odin's message.

"What does it mean?" "Will he never come back?" asked the crowd excitedly.

"He has gone from us forever," repeated Frey sadly. "But in Valhalla, he will receive those who fight and fall in defending his kingdom."

"Odin has returned to Aasgaard," went the rumor and many suggested: "Let us send to Aasgaard and bring him back." But nobody knew or remembered where Aasgaard lay; or whether he meant the earthly Aasgaard or some magical Aasgaard in Heaven.



As Odin had declared that he would never return, it was decided to burn his body on a mighty funeral pyre. It was the belief that the higher the smoke ascended, the higher the spirit of the departed would sit in Heaven. The smoke from Odin's pyre went up and up—higher than smoke had ever reached before, which seemed a sign that Odin's place in Heaven was of the highest. Thus Aasgaard came to be regarded as a celestial city and Odin as a god; Valhalla, his home for fallen heroes, was at the end of the rainbow, it was said.

Frey built a new temple at Upsala, finer than the old one and consecrated it to Odin, using for this purpose the income from the lands which Odin had given him.<sup>15</sup> For many years Frey ruled the kingdom and at this time the Great Peace came over the world. Nowhere on earth was there fighting, not even down in the empire of the imperial Augustus at Romaborg. For in those days, the Christ was born. But no one in the Far North knew of the event. Little did they realize that some day, even in Upsala, the worship of their Wonder-Prince would yield to the worship of a still greater Wonder-Prince from the East.

Then the time came when Frey must also depart on the long journey, a spirit journey, leaving his body behind. His nearest friends did not dare to tell the Swedes—as the people of his kingdom

were now called—that Frey had left them. They carried his body secretly to a hill where they watched over it for three years, saying that he still lived there. There were three openings to the hill and thither the people brought offerings to their beloved king until one hole became filled with gold, another with silver and the third with copper money. In the meantime, Freya, his sister, presided over the sacrifices. She lived long after all the other Aasa folk were dead and was famed for her knowledge throughout the Far North. But when the Swedes finally discovered that Frey had really left them while peace and prosperity still continued, they decided that his body should never be burned. Thereafter he was regarded as the god of peace and good times and received more homage than even the war-like Odin.

Frey's son succeeded his father as king of Sweden but met an unfortunate death, for while visiting his friend the king of Denmark at Leidra, he fell into a cistern which held the castle's mead supply and was drowned. His son Sveгда when he became Sweden's king, made a rash promise, for he said he would find Aasgaard again. The people had begun to miss the advice and leadership of the wise Aasa folk and they thought that perhaps after all Odin had returned to the old Aasgaard.

Svegda started out across the plain of Scythia with twelve leaders, just as Odin had come with twelve warrior-priests to the Far North. Traveling was easier than in the old days so that they finally came down to Turkey; then to Vanaland where they actually found the city of Tanais whence Frey and Freya had come.

"The people resemble us," cried Sveгда jubilantly. "We must be near our journey's end."

And so they were.

One evening King Sveгда and his men were entertained at a fine manor house. On the grounds there was a rock as large as the house itself, which they were shown as a curiosity. On the way home after the banquet, where they had had much to eat and drink, they went by the rock and were surprised to see a dwarf sitting near it.

"Come in, come in," cried the dwarf, pointing to a door that had suddenly made its appearance. "Odin is awaiting you there."

It seemed a streak of luck, a sign from the gods themselves and so King Sveгда went in, followed by the dwarf. The door closed—and disappeared. King Sveгда was never seen again.

But Odin had not really deserted his people. When the Norsemen met with reverses in battle and all human help seemed unavailing, in spirit he came to their aid. First there was a whirring in the air and a glint of white and gold as though



the golden-haired Valkyrie maidens were riding by on their white horses. Then came a gigantic shape on horseback with dazzling armor and a mighty sword.

"Forward, yours is the victory!" it shouted, and the Valkyries echoed and re-echoed their triumphal war-cry.

Yes, their Wonder-Prince was with them still and each warrior knew that if he fell in the fight, he would come with Odin's warrior maids to Valhalla.

And sometimes, too, the gifted ones among the Norsemen have had a glimpse of Aasgaard. Some holy priest or priestess with eyes strained toward the east has in the glories of a sunrise seen the sacred city. The clouds rolled back like a curtain. There it stood; its spires and minarets shimmering as in ancient times, its battlements rising from a sea of molten gold. But as the fortunate one looked, the clouds shifted and the vision faded. It had only been a glimpse. No mortal could ever hope to find again on earth that mysterious shining city.<sup>16</sup>

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Aasgaard in the old Norse tongue is pronounced "Os-gor," but modern English writers have written and pronounced it "Asgard." This tale is based on the opening of Snorra's *Heimskringla* which literally translated is:

"*The circle of the world (heimskringla) on which people live is very much indented for great bays from the world-sea*

flow into the land. It is known that a sea flows in from Gibraltar as far as Jerusalem; from this sea a long body of water extends to the northeast, called the Black Sea. This separates the three world-divisions from each other; that to the east is called Asia, the land to the west is called Europe or Enea, but north is the great, cold Scythia."

Then comes the story of Odin, the Wonder-Prince.

Written copies on parchment of Snorra's great work were circulated throughout the Far North shortly after the author's death (1241). A fine copy was kept in the library at Bergen for over three hundred years, when it was transferred to Copenhagen. At this time it was noticed that the first page with the introduction was missing and as the second page began with the words "heimskringla" (meaning "circle of the world"), this copy became known as *Heimskringla*. Gradually all copies of the work were called by the same title until it became generally known as *Heimskringla*, although its real title as given by Snorra is *The Saga of the Sons of Frey* (*Ynglinga Saga*). (See preceding story *The Skald From Iceland*.)

The Copenhagen copy of the work was burned in the library fire of 1728, but one leaf had been taken to Stockholm and may still be seen in the royal library there.

<sup>2</sup>Snorra does not say definitely what were the deities worshiped at Aasgaard, but Gudmund Schütte, a Danish expert in ancient lore, says:

"What powers then, sat in the High Seat of the Gods? The answer can hardly be doubted,—first and foremost the powers of the high heaven. . . . In the Bronze Age our forefathers learned to represent the Sun in artificial models which indicate a customary worship of that body. Most worthy of mention is the 'Sun Car' that was dug up in the Trundholm marsh on Zealand in 1902. Its style is *Greek* and could indicate an origin from the time ca. 1000 B. C., although it may

also date from a somewhat later period. The Sun is shown as a round gold-covered disk, set on wheels and drawn by a bronze horse.”—From *Hjemligt Hedenskab*.

The sun idol mentioned can still be seen in the National Museum of Copenhagen. It is in good condition, although reckoned to be at least twenty-four hundred years old, and gives one an idea what the Norsemen worshiped before they knew Odin as a god.

<sup>3</sup>The warrior maiden was honored by the Norsemen from the earliest times. When Odin was raised to the rank of a god, his following of virgin amazons were known as Valkyries —“choosers of the dead” (*val*)—and brought the heroes who fell in battle to their liege lord. The Danish monk Saxo, Snorra’s contemporary—about 1200—does not seem to have approved of the heathen warrior maids of former times. He says in part:

“That none may be surprised at the interest the weaker sex showed for war, I shall make a short digression to explain: In days of old there were women among the Danes who spent most of their time in developing warlike sports. They hardened body and soul and renounced the gentler feminine arts. It was especially strong-minded women or those with tall, slender figures that followed this life. Forgetting the conditions of their birth, they preferred harshness to gentle words, blows to caresses. Spears were in the fair hands; death was in their thoughts, and with sharp weapons they attacked the men they could have conquered with their charms. . . . Now I shall return to the main thread of my story.”

In the Copenhagen National Museum, the actual dresses worn by Norse women in the Bronze Age (500 B. C. or earlier) are to be seen. That they are preserved in good condition seems to be due to the fact they lay in oak chests and



acid from the wood has acted as a preservative. A belt-plate worn with the gown resembles a shield.

<sup>4</sup>Odin's palace in Aasgaard was later known as Valhalla—the hall of the dead (*val*)—and there, according to the Norse belief, all heroes that fell in battle would meet. It shone with gold, according to the sagas, and was of enormous proportions, with five hundred and forty doors through each of which eight hundred men could pass abreast. The beams of the hall were spears, the roof was made of shields.

<sup>5</sup>There seems to be a distinct touch of the East in this incident in Snorra's tale. Does it not suggest the Oriental custom of the blessing?

<sup>6</sup>Snorra calls the river where the Vana folk lived, Tanais and describes their home as being around the delta of this river by the Black Sea. In the Historical Atlas of Professor William R. Shepherd, of Columbia University, Tanais is shown as a Greek colony from 500 B. C. or earlier. Are the Norse god Frey and his sister, the goddess Freya, perhaps of Greek origin?

<sup>7</sup>Rome.

<sup>8</sup>"It was common belief that the soul of a person even while alive could travel freely about while the body lay in a trance. Sometimes the soul took its owner's true form,—as a 'materialized spirit,' to quote the language of spiritualists of to-day—but often or oftener the shape of an animal—an idea that is also found in ancient Greece and other lands. It is easily understood that the chosen animal shape often typified one of the owner's traits." Thus Gudmund Schütte explains this popular old-time belief, showing how the nightmare and the werewolf were regarded as two such manifestations. People who could not otherwise leave their bodies could sometimes, just before death, visit in spirit their relatives or friends. Schütte remarks, "Our so-called 'enlightened age' had until a

few years ago dismissed this idea as pure superstition, but the most recent investigations have shown that the 'superstition' in this case went deeper than critical science: for it is an established fact that the dying can show themselves to their dear ones far away without being bound by so-called physical ties. Among all types of folk-belief this idea is one of the most persistent and with good reason. *Heathen lore* has scored a point here over critical science."

<sup>9</sup>Skiold is pronounced Sholl. The leaders of this expedition become the gods of Norse mythology: Frey is the god of prosperity and ancestor of the Norwegian kings; Tor (or Thor) is god of war; Balder is god of light; Heimdal, god of the rainbow; Skiold is the divine ancestor of the *Danish kings*; Freya is the goddess of love, etc.

<sup>10</sup>This island, Fyn, is now a part of Denmark and the town of Odense is the most ancient seat of the worship of Odin, in Scandinavia. A medieval church now stands on the spot where Odin's temple probably stood. All the main roads on the island lead to this spot.

<sup>11</sup>Regarding Gefion, the "gift-maiden," Gudmund Schütte says: "Her position in the world of gods is somewhat uncertain. Snorra places her among the Aasa folk, but he also says that she had sons with a giant and these sons belong to a known group of water demon that in animal form bring lakes and streams forth from the grottos of earth. . . . Snorra distinctly makes Gefion immigrate into the Northland from the south; she followed with Odin through Germany."

<sup>12</sup>The wonders of Leidra have been sung not only in Scandinavia but in England. In the Anglo-Saxon *Song of Beowulf* the scene is laid at Leidra, and a fine drinking hall hung with deer horns is described which Gudmund Schütte thinks must have been a temple. Leidra's most famous king at that time

(about 500 A. D.) was Rolf Krakka who figured in Snorra's saga and the writings of the Danish monk, Saxo.

Leidra had already lost its importance a thousand years ago when Roskilde, near by, became Denmark's capital. A little village, Leire, now marks the spot, but there are great mounds near by and an impressive wood said to have been a sacred grove from the most ancient times, where an altar to Odin is still shown.

<sup>13</sup>On this island at Copenhagen, Gefion and her oxen are to-day commemorated by a large fountain where the warrior maiden is shown driving her plow, the water gushing from the furrow.

The lake in Sweden is the beautiful Maelar where Stockholm is now situated.

<sup>14</sup>Sweden's university town, Upsala, now lies near the ancient Upsala which is still marked by a number of great mounds, one of which is said to be Odin's grave. The Danish monk, Saxo, in his Christian belief can not acknowledge Odin as the earlier Norsemen did. He says (about 1200 A. D.):

"At that time there lived a man called Odin who over the whole of Europe was falsely considered a god. He lived most in Upsala, perhaps because the people there were particularly stupid or because the place had a beautiful situation. The kings of the Northland who considered him divine made an idol of gold in his likeness, adorned it with great bracelets and sent it to him in Byzantium."

Saxo describes Odin as making trips between the Northland and Byzantium where he says "the gods had their capital," but he is careful to explain his use of the term "gods" by saying: "Of course they were more gods in name than real deities; we only call them that because our heathen forefathers did, not because they were gods."



Snorra also mentions that: "Odin had great estates in Turkey."

<sup>15</sup>Saxo, the Danish monk, evidently influenced by his religious prejudices does not take as kindly a view of Frey as Snorra does, but Snorra's idea is of course to present the whole line of Frey in the finest possible light. Saxo says:

"Frey now established himself at Upsala as the Gods' viceroy, where instead of conducting the sacrifices in the manner sanctioned by many hundred years, he introduced the sad and disgusting custom of human sacrifices."

<sup>16</sup>The tremendous personality of Odin, the man, and the meaning of this personality for the Northland are confirmed by the way this tale is told by Snorra who, although he regards him from the standpoint of the Christian Middle Ages as a mortal endowed with magical powers, continually treats him as a divinity. The revulsion of the recent Christianized Middle Ages from the thought of Odin as divine, is shown in some of the later tales where Snorra describes a dethroned Odin, wandering around as a sort of troll.

Later ages make a truer valuation of this unusual character. Thus Thomas Carlyle in his famous lecture on heroes (1841) makes Odin the theme of "The Hero as a Divinity" and says in part:

"For the Norse people, the Man now named Odin, and Chief Norse God, was a Teacher, and Captain of soul and body; a Hero, of worth *immeasurable*; admiration for whom, transcending the known bounds, became adoration. Of Odin what history? Strange rather to reflect that he *had* a history! That this Odin in his wild Norse vesture was a man like us; with our sorrows, joys, with our limbs, features: and did such a work. 'Wednesday' men will say tomorrow; Odin's day!"

Carlyle is inclined to disagree with Snorra and the Danish Saxo in attempting to identify Odin's life with known his-

torical events. And regarding a later attempt in the same direction he says: "Torfaeus, learned and cautious, some centuries later, says that Odin came into Europe about the Year 70 before Christ. Of all which, as grounded on mere uncertainties, found to be untenable now, I need say nothing. Far, very far beyond the Year 70! Odin's date, adventures, figure and environment are sunk from us forever into unknown thousands of years."

But the modern Danish authority, Gudmund Schütte, says: "When Christendom was already on the way toward undermining the pillars of paganism in southern lands, a new pagan faith was just finding its way into the Northland, the belief in the Aasa deities. Not only is it the newest but the best known of our pagan faiths and the Eddas of the Icelanders have made it classical. Around the All-Father Odin, all the earlier deities as worshipped by the Norsemen must group themselves as moons, planets and fixed stars around the middle point of a solar system."

### III

## THE WOLF'S HEART

*Ingvald*, the Wolf King

*Olaf of the Tree-Ax*

*Granmar*, a King in South  
Sweden

*Aasa*, the Wolf Princess

*Yorvar*, a knight

*Hildegunn*, a daughter of  
Granmar

*Svipdag*, a magician

ONCE a year the princes of Sweden came to the sacred city of Upsala to attend the mid-winter festival of Odin. The time was long past when all Sweden was under one king as in the days of Frey. But even though the country was divided into little kingdoms that were often at war with one another, all the rulers came with their families once a year to the ancient capital where a king of the line of Frey still held the throne. It was a very great occasion.<sup>1</sup>

While the princes were busy arranging for the ceremonies, their sons played in the temple garden.

"Let us play soldier," cried the six-year-old Ingvald. "I shall be a general!"

"I shall also be a general," said one of his comrades.

"And I!" exclaimed a third. "Let us all be generals and each pretend he has an army."

So they began marching back and forth, giving commands as they had heard their fathers do.



Only one boy did not play; he was a quiet fellow named Granmar who did not care for war or battle.

"Now," cried Ingvald suddenly, "I am the greatest general and all must obey *me*." Ingvald's father was a direct descendant of the God Frey and as he ruled at Upsala, the other kings were in a way his guests.

"I am quite as great a general as you!" answered one.

"You can not be, for *my* father is greater than all *your* fathers," replied Ingvald boastfully.

"Let us fight and see!" called the other and gave Ingvald a blow on the cheek.

As Ingvald was really not at all brave, he put his hands over his eyes and ran home crying. There he found his father's wise man, Svipdag.

"Oh," sobbed the little boy, "I am so unhappy! We were playing soldier and I have been beaten because I am weaker than the others."

"That is a shame," answered the wise man. "We shall see what can be done."

Now Svipdag knew arts of magic which the Aasa folk had brought with them from the East. The next day Ingvald saw him cooking something over an open fire.

"What is that?" asked the little boy.

"Something for a prince of the line of Frey to eat!" answered Svipdag.

And he gave him a piece of meat which the boy ate.

"My!" cried the child, "how strong I now feel. I am sure none of my comrades will beat me again."

Svipdag laughed. "They will never beat you again," he repeated.

What a change had come over Ingvald. He felt as powerful as a grown man and as hard as iron. But it was not only his body that was hardened; his soul was also changed. A cruel light came into his eyes and his smile was like the sneer of an animal baring its white teeth. What was the matter? The wicked old magician had given the boy a wolf's heart to eat!

It was many years before they met again—the little boys who had played soldier at the winter festival. But they did meet once more and it was at Upsala, where Ingvald, now a young man, was to take his father's throne. An enormous hall was built for the coronation, and messengers were sent over all the land to invite the guests. In the hall were seven high seats for the seven princes—Ingvald's former playmates—who now ruled in the different parts of Sweden. On the appointed day they came, each prince with a throng of warriors, and all eager to see the famous "Hall of the Seven Princes," as the new building was called.

When the enormous hall was filled—it covered almost as much ground as the rest of the city—it was noticed that one of the high seats was vacant. This was intended for Granmar, who years before had refused to play soldier with Ingvald and his comrades. Granmar was also now a prince with a little kingdom of his own, but he refused the invitation because he knew that Ingvald had eaten the wolf's heart. Otherwise all the guests were present.

At the foot of the highest throne sat Ingvald. A page brought him a handsome beaker filled with mead and he lifted it above his head to drink a toast. There was a breathless silence. The first drink taken by a new-made king was always followed by a vow and every one was anxious to hear what Ingvald's vow would be. Imagine the surprise and consternation when the prince spoke as follows:

"I swear," cried Ingvald, "that I will extend my kingdom in every direction to double its present size. Otherwise I shall die!" Then he emptied the horn and ascended the throne.

As all the assembled princes owned land near Ingvald's kingdom, his vow was practically a challenge to them. But what could they do about it? Ingvald had really not said anything definite against any one of them. Meanwhile the mead was being passed and the minstrels were playing



and no one seemed inclined to press such a delicate matter further. And the evening went on.

Late that night the company was still very merry. In fact Ingvald had given his guests such a mixture of intoxicating drinks that they did not notice that he had quietly left the party. The wicked old magician Svipdag came meanwhile, according to Ingvald's orders, and stationed armed men all around the outside of the hall. These warriors bore not only arms but torches, and, Ingvald being safely out, they set the Hall of the Seven Princes on fire.

Such a scene as followed! Those of the guests that escaped the flames were met by Ingvald's soldiers who despatched them by the sword. Not one escaped, prince or warrior.

Immediately following up this terrible wolfish act, the cruel Ingvald led his army into the lands belonging to his late guests and took possession of a large part of Sweden. Thus his vow taken at the banquet was fulfilled within a few days after it was made.

But Prince Granmar continued to rule over his own realm in the south of Sweden. He was glad, you may be sure, that he had not gone to the feast of the seven princes. He had been living quietly in his palace where his main joy was his beautiful, young daughter Hildegunn. But after the wholesale slaughter of his comrades, he was worried by

the thought of the terrible Prince of the Wolf's Heart. What would he do next?

One day there came a rumor that a strange knight had landed on Granmar's coast with a band of fighting men. Nobody knew whence they came or what their mission.

"This is no doubt a trick of Ingvald," thought Granmar. So he sent messengers to ask the knight why he had come.

Granmar's messengers were so well received that suspicion was partly dispelled, and shortly after the knight himself appeared at Granmar's court where he was invited to dine. When all were assembled, the stranger on a high seat opposite the royal throne, Granmar told his daughter to fill the beakers of the guests. The fair Hildegunn took a silver horn and stood before the warrior.

"Greetings, to our brave strange visitor," she said. And after lifting the cup to her own lips, she passed it to the knight. The latter, charmed by her manner, took not only the cup, but her hand and asked her to take the place beside him.

"It is not the Viking<sup>2</sup> custom for a woman to sit like that," replied Hildegunn, blushing.

"It is the custom in other lands," answered the visitor. "Every knight should have his lady at the feast."

He finally persuaded her to sit beside him and

as the meal proceeded, he told her many tales of strange countries far away. Hildegunn's clear blue eyes were fixed on the animated face of her father's guest. She had never heard such tales before or seen such a splendid knight. He was not only entertaining, but noble and brave.

"My name is Yorvar," said the knight to Granmar, the next day. "And I come to ask for the hand of Hildegunn. On many seas and through many lands I have journeyed but have never before met a maiden so charming. As your son-in-law, you will always find me ready to defend your cause and hers."

Granmar was no longer young and he had no son to succeed him; thus he looked with favor on such a worthy champion as a husband for his beloved Hildegunn. Here was a leader who might long protect his little kingdom from the Wolf King at Upsala. Hildegunn had already lost her heart to this ardent wooer and it was therefore not long before the matter was arranged and the fair Hildegunn became Yorvar's happy bride.

Now, King Ingvald at Upsala had also a daughter. She was called Aasa after the noble race of people from which the family sprung, but she lacked her family's noble qualities. People even whispered that she had rather inherited the wolf nature of her father, for her handsome black eyes shone with a cold light, while her fine lips could





"Greetings to our brave visitor."



curve in the same cruel smile as his. Aasa was of a jealous nature and when she heard about the strange knight's appearance and Hildegunn's happy marriage, she gnashed her teeth with envy. No stalwart mysterious stranger had come a-courting *her!* If he had, he would probably have been frightened by her cold gleaming eyes.

"Why don't you take the lands of King Granmar?" said Aasa to her father one day. "He will soon die any way and why should Yorvar, a stranger, inherit a kingdom in Sweden?"

"A good idea, my daughter," answered Ingvald. "We will advise Svipdag to arrange matters." Ingvald always sent for the wicked magician, when he had some especially evil plan in view.

It was a big army that Ingvald and Svipdag led southward to capture Granmar's lands, for now the wolf-hearted king had all the rest of Sweden from which to draw soldiers. But many of these came against their wills and they fought only for fear of the terrible Ingvald. The result was, that while Ingvald's force was superior in numbers, Yorvar was able to inspire Granmar's troops to resist the lawless invaders and victory fell to the smaller army. Ingvald, suffering from many wounds, fled to his ship, and his army was routed. The old magician who had originally caused all the trouble with the wolf's heart, perished on the battle-field.

The years went by. Hildegunn and her knight



lived happily in the palace of King Granmar. The wolf-hearted prince still sat in power at Upsala, for the peaceful Granmar had not cared to follow up his victory with an attack on his enemy's capital. And Aasa, the Wolf Princess, sat alone in the house of her father and envied the happiness of Hildegunn.

Again came the daughter of the Wolf King to her father.

"Alas," she cried, "the feud between Your Majesty and King Granmar has lasted too long. Let there be a peace declared, a peace sanctified by the holiest ceremonials; let us welcome Granmar and his people to Upsala once more, as in the good old days."

Now wise men had come into the council of Ingvald after the death of the wicked Svipdag and they strongly seconded the proposal of Princess Aasa. The wise men of King Granmar also advised a peace, as did the knight Yorvar, and Hildegunn rejoiced at the idea. Every one in Sweden was weary of the strife and wanted a return to days of trust and confidence, as in the time of Frey.

But Granmar was heavy at heart. He had reason to fear any proposal from Ingvald. The popular sentiment and his daughter's prayers, however, finally persuaded him. Great was the jubilation the land over when King Granmar with the knight Yorvar and Hildegunn came to Upsala to

bind the peace with the holiest of ceremonies. Yes, the two rulers, Ingvald and Granmar, pledged each other in the most sacred manner; the feud was ended,—neither could break the Great Peace without incurring the most terrible wrath of the gods.

Visitors in Upsala always sought the priestesses to have their fortunes read in the runes.<sup>3</sup>

“Let us see what the Fates have in store for me,” cried the fair Hildegunn. The priestess arranged the sticks, but when they fell she shook her head. There was bad luck in the combination of the runes.

“Come,” cried Yorvar, “let me try. I am sure to have good luck and all I find will be shared with my lady Hildegunn.”

But the sticks were no more kind to the warrior than they had been to the princess.

“You try, father,” urged Hildegunn to Granmar. “Surely one of us three should be able to stand in fortune’s good graces.”

But when the sticks fell this time, even the priestess frowned. For a moment she was silent; then she spoke:

“Death,” she read slowly from the runes, “sudden—violent!”

These prophecies filled the men with forebodings which Hildegunn tried in vain to dispel. They decided to leave Upsala at once, but before

returning home they paid a visit to a nobleman living on a near-by island. The nobleman was a tried and trusted friend and Granmar came to him without a large following. For under the great peace it was agreed to keep smaller armies and every one knew that not even such a person as Ingvald would dare to violate the holy compact.

But Ingvald had long since ceased to be a person. The wolf heart had so grown in him that he had become less a man and more a bloodthirsty beast. Aasa, his daughter, was also mad with jealousy when she saw the happy pair in Upsala. In fact she had suggested the great peace only that Yorvar and Hildegunn might be destroyed.

Late one night came Ingvald and Aasa to the lonely island where Granmar was a guest. All was quiet. The newly-arrived company sat at dinner with the nobleman's household. Suddenly they looked out and marked a lurid blaze against the black of the night. What was it?

The crackling of burning timber was the only answer. The house was on fire!

As the flames burned more fiercely, they lighted up the courtyard and there the affrighted company could see a row of armored figures. The place was completely surrounded by armed assassins in the pay of the Wolf Prince.

Thus perished the good King Granmar, the fair



Hildegunn and her gallant knight on one funeral pyre. The prophecy of the rune sticks was fulfilled. But the wolf fiends, Ingvald and Aasa, did not have long to gloat over their victims.

When the people in Sweden heard that the sacred peace had been broken, a wave of horror spread from one end of the land to the other. An army of Granmar's faithful subjects set out for Upsala to demand that Prince Ingvald be delivered up to justice. As the army marched northward, it grew and grew. Even the people of Upsala welcomed with joy this chance to punish two human monsters who had caused so much misery.

Ingvald and Aasa sat at dinner in their palace when the news reached them that the whole of Sweden had risen. They had carried their tyranny too far. But where could they fly? Whom could they trust? Like two wolves that had terrorized a community, they stood at bay, waiting for the final struggle with those who came out to hunt them.

Ingvald and Aasa took council. There was one way out.

"Let us feast!" cried the prince. "Let the best in the house be brought forward."

"Let us drink!" cried the princess, and all the finest wines were brought from the cellars.

Such a festival had not been seen since Ingvald's coronation in the Hall of the Seven Princes. The murderers who had surrounded the house where

Granmar and Hildegunn were burned, drank and caroused and sang wild songs in praise of their wolf-hearted ruler. The feast became an orgy. There was more wine and more wine. Ingvald's retainers fell over one another and lay in drunken stupor through the halls.

Then the last scene! The cruel Ingvald and the haughty Aasa stand hand in hand in the center of the wild bacchanal. They are Vikings both, and their courage, coldness and cruelty have been increased a hundredfold by the influence of the wolf's heart. The king takes a torch from its niche in the wall and touches it to one of the rafters. The wood takes fire. In a fierce exaltation the father and daughter stand motionless as the flames leap along the roof and lick their way down the walls.

The approaching army see the conflagration. It is as though all Upsala had burst into flame. They hasten through the streets where there is a fiercer light than the light of noon in midsummer. Now they will seize their victims, the wicked wolf-people, and bring them to justice!

They come too late. Ingvald has lighted his own funeral pyre and he and Aasa, the Wolf Princess, have perished in the mighty conflagration.

Now Ingvald's son Olaf had not inherited the wolf nature of his father, but the people would

have none of him and he was forced to flee with a few friends. He traveled west into sparsely-inhabited wilds, hewing trees to make room for new settlements until he became known as Olaf of the Tree-Ax. His sons, bold hardy pioneers, went farther west. Thus the royal line of Frey, that had ruled so many years at Upsala, came finally to Norway.

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<sup>1</sup>The pagan festival to celebrate the return of the sun. It is a coincidence that Christ's birthday came to be celebrated at about the same time as the heathen festival—just when the days begin to lengthen. In many ways it seems that the early Christians, in introducing new customs, tried to make them coincide as nearly as possible with the old.

<sup>2</sup>The people of the Northland had gradually come by the name "Viking." They always had shown their preference for settling at the end of a fiord or bay and they seem to have taken the term from *vik*, the Norse word meaning bay or inlet. The wisdom of making such settlements at a time when life was so insecure is most evident. These inlets were often difficult to find and fleets with hostile intent could easily lose their way in trying to make an attack, while the Vikings, familiar with the intricate passages, had a great advantage. The ancient cities of Leidra and Odense (see previous story) were originally each at the end of a fiord difficult of access, but the sites now lie several miles inland. In those days a city like Copenhagen or Stockholm (founded in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries), lying out to the open sea, would have been constantly in danger. With a change in conditions, however, most of the older cities of Norse culture lost their importance.

<sup>3</sup>"In the most ancient heathen times, there was much super-



stition connected with the runes. It was thought they could be used for tricks of magic and to produce supernatural effects where they were carved. 'Strong Runes' are mentioned, whose secret strength could weaken the enemy's weapon, cause or appease storm and bad weather, put out fire, change people into other shapes, give foresight and summon spirits. 'Victory Runes' were carved on a sword-hilt or belt to bring victory in battle. With 'Love Runes' it was thought that one could win affection. By scratching on the finger-nail the Rune 'N' meaning 'Naud' (that is, Need) it was thought a woman's faithfulness and affection could be secured. All such runes must, however, be carefully used, as a misuse could cause sickness and death." From A. Fabricius' *History of Denmark*.

Snorra intimates that a great deal of the magic used by Odin, the Wonder-Prince, in leading his people from Aasgaard to the Far North was accomplished by means of runes, which he discovered. The Icelandic *Havamal* makes Odin describe the tortures he underwent to discover the runes, as follows: (The *Havamal* is a collection of Icelandic rules and proverbs supposed to date back to Odin himself.)

"I know that I hung on the windy tree nine nights together, wounded by a spear, sacrificed to Odin, myself to myself, on the tree which no one knows from what roots it springs. Neither with food nor with drink was I refreshed. I looked carefully down and raised up the runes; crying I raised them up, and fell, then, down."

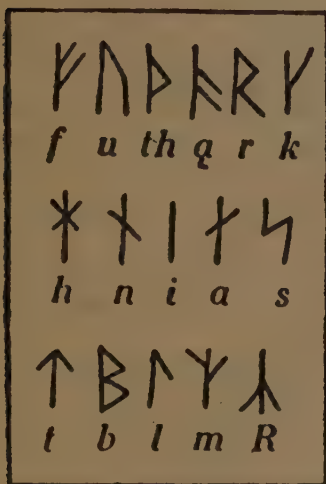
"Runic inscriptions have been found wherever Germanic peoples have dwelt, but they are especially numerous in the Scandinavian countries and in Great Britain. The runic inscriptions on stone are by far the most important, and these are found principally in the Scandinavian countries. One hundred inscriptions in the older runic alphabet, from 300 to 700

A. D. are found in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, some of which are of great length.

"The Norwegian scholar Sophus Bugge advanced the opinion that they originated among the Goths, in the region north of the Black Sea, an idea which gained further support through the investigations of the Swedish archæologist, Bernhard Salin. He showed that the runes must have been brought to the North along the old routes of intercourse between the Black Sea and the Baltic, known to have existed even in the Bronze Age, as they first made their appearance in those regions.

"Of the twenty-four runes in the older runic alphabet, fifteen are surely derived from the Greek alphabet and five more are, presumably, traceable to the same source. Only four are derived from the Latin alphabet. . . . The first six characters from the word *futhark* which is often used instead of the word alphabet to designate the system of runic letters.

. . . . The change in the form of the letters was occasioned by the fact that the runes were carved on wood or cut in stone or metal, which made the use of the angle and straight line much more convenient than the curve or circle.



"The runic alphabet common to all Germanic peoples, was replaced in the North by the younger runic alphabet of sixteen characters about the year 850. This system is developed from the older runic alphabet and has been used exclusively in the Scandinavian countries." From Doctor Knut Gjerset's *History of the Norwegian People*.

The later *futhark* was as shown,—standing for f, u, th, a, r, k, h, n, i, a, s, t or d, p or b, l, m, r (y).

"Writing by Runes has some air of being original among the Norsemen; not a Phœnician Alphabet, but a native Scandinavian one," says Carlyle in his famous Lecture on Heroes. "Snorra tells us farther that Odin invented Poetry; the music of human speech, as well as that miraculous runic marking of it.

"Suppose Odin to have been the inventor of Letters, as well as 'magic' among the people! It is the greatest invention man has ever made, this of marking-down the unseen thought that is in him by written characters. It is a kind of second speech, almost as miraculous as the first. If Odin brought Letters among his people, he might work magic enough!"



## IV

### QUEEN RAGNHILD'S DREAM TREE

*King Halfdan the Black*

*Prince Harald*

*Torleif, the wise man*

*A Magician from Finland*

*Queen Ragnhild<sup>1</sup>*

PLACE: A little kingdom in southern Norway.<sup>2</sup>

QUEEN RAGNHILD'S garden was a bower of delights, but its beauties were hidden from the eyes of ordinary mortals by a high wall. Through the gate, one had glimpses of walks lined with box hedges, of avenues of stately trees, of a fountain throwing delicate sprays to the wind, of enchanting grottoes and retreats. Ivy clung in the niches of the time-worn wall and over the top clambered scape-grace roses trying to hide Time's scars with a pink-and-white tapestry of bloom.

It was an evening in late summer that Queen Ragnhild walked in her garden. The white nights of the Far North were waning, but a crescent moon like a sickle of ivory shone in the sky and its beams fell on the queen's hair, pale and shining as the moon itself.

The queen strolled up and down the walks where the roses grew. There were thousands of roses—royal blossoms, as countless as the pale stars that spangled the heavens. There were white flowers and yellow and red, wax-like, drooping

their heads as though heavy with slumber,—and scentless as the roses of Norway are. Other flowers, however, exhaled a grateful odor to the night, and the queen as she strolled breathed in their fragrance.

On such a beautiful night even the gods in the heavenly Aasgaard might wish themselves back on earth. The haze of late summer that lingered near the earth seemed to imprison and intensify the fragrance of the garden. Queen Ragnhild became drowsy with the scent and the beauty of it.

“When the goddess Freya passes to-night,” she sighed, “I feel she will send me a dream.”

Soon after, the queen retired.

Into her chamber on the wings of the soft moonlight sped a silvery vision. A thousand years later men and women were still talking of Queen Ragnhild’s wonderful dream:

The queen thought that she still strolled in her garden, down the walk where the slumbering roses hung their heavy heads. Suddenly she stopped. A thorn had caught her gown. She removed the thorn and as she held it in her hand it began to grow.

It grew and grew until it became a tree. One end attached itself to the ground and immediately roots spread out to hold it. The other end reached high into the air. Then the tree became so big that the royal lady couldn’t see over its top. Its

roots were red as blood while the trunk was a shimmering green and the branches toward the top were as white as snow. There were many twigs on the tree; some higher up, some lower down. Some of the branches were so long that they reached to the very end of Norway and even beyond. The next morning, Queen Ragnhild met her husband with a glowing countenance.

"Only think," she cried, "the goddess Freya sent me a dream last night from Aasgaard!" And she told him of the wonderful thorn tree.

King Halfdan never was blessed or troubled with dreams and he thought it strange that his wife so often had interesting things to tell him in the morning, when all he could say was, "I slept very well, thank you." He wished he might have at least one dream. So he summoned his wise man, Torleif, and asked what could be done.

"When one really wishes to dream," answered Torleif, "one should sleep in the pig-sty. *I* always experience something unusual when I sleep there. Sometimes I dream about future events and they are sure to happen according to the dream."

"I shall try that myself," answered King Halfdan, and that night he slept in the pig-sty.

When the king awoke the next morning he found that he had finally had the dream he had waited and wished for. At breakfast the queen



asked him how he had slept, and instead of having to say, "Very well, thank you," he could reply:

"I slept very badly, Your Majesty, but I have had a most unusual dream."

"Do tell me what it was about!" cried the queen, much interested. So King Halfdan called his wise man that he might also hear, and spoke as follows:

"I was not long asleep, when I thought that my hair began to grow. It grew and grew until it was thicker and longer than hair could ever be. But the locks were of different lengths. Some of them reached to the ground, others to my calves, others to my knees, others to my hips, and others to my waist. Some were only as long as to my throat and still others lay in knots on my head. But there was a still stranger thing about this growth of hair. Some of the locks were of one color and some of another. One strand was particularly noticeable, being thicker, glossier and more beautiful than the others. Now what do you suppose such a dream could mean?"

"It sounds something like my dream about the tree," put in the queen.

Now the wise man had not yet given his interpretation of Queen Ragnhild's dream.

"Well," said the wise man, apparently not noticing the queen's remark, "I think your dream may be read like this. The different locks are the different people that shall spring from you. Like

the locks, your descendants will grow and prosper; they will bring honor to your house. But all will not be equally great; some will only rule over a little territory, while others will be great chieftains and princes. That is why the locks in your dream were of different lengths and colors. As for the heavy, shining, beautiful strand, that means there will come one among your descendants, greater and nobler than all the others. His name shall be Olaf."

King Halfdan was naturally delighted at this interpretation of his dream. But Queen Ragnhild sighed. She had hoped that the shining beautiful strand might have meant their son, her favorite. But his name was Harald and not Olaf. It was evident that it would be a long time before there could be a great prince of her race called Olaf and so she would probably never see the fulfillment of the dream. In the meantime she did not dare ask Torleif to interpret the dream *she* had had.

But the little prince Harald was no unworthy son of his strong father and his lovely mother. Nor was he unworthy of the great race from which his father was sprung, for his father's ancestors had come over the mountains from Sweden where *their* fathers had ruled in the great city of Upsala, children of the god Frey himself. Though only a little child, Harald had the noble bearing and the fine expression that one would expect to find

in the representative of such a royal race. His blue eyes were clear and true, he was the picture of health, and his hair was like spun gold. Day by day Queen Ragnhild watched the boy as he grew in strength and promise. But there was a sorrow in her heart, for King Halfdan did not love their son as she did.

One Yuletide<sup>3</sup> King Halfdan gave a party to which he invited many great people, not only from his own realm but from other of the little kingdoms of Norway. When the company came into the banquet hall, the king gazed at the tables and could hardly believe his eyes. All the delicious dishes his cooks had prepared had disappeared! Nothing was left, not even the plates. The company at first thought it was a joke, but when a search was made and no trace of the food could be found, they began to realize that the loss of a dinner was no joke after all.

King Halfdan shouted and commanded and fumed, but all his efforts did not bring the dinner back. The guests grew hungrier and hungrier until one by one they began to remember that they had important engagements elsewhere. So this one went with this excuse and that one with another and finally King Halfdan was left seated at the head of his long, empty banquet table.

"What has become of my feast?" thundered King Halfdan, his black eyes flashing. Queen



Ragnhild ran in haste to call Torleif, the wise man.

"Do you remember that Finn to whom you recently gave shelter?" answered Torleif. "All Finns are versed in the Black Art, so why don't you ask him about it?"

"Bring in that fellow from Finland!" commanded the king, and in a few moments the Finn stood before him.

"What has become of my feast?" roared King Halfdan. "If you are a magician you ought to be able to tell me."

"Indeed, I don't know, Your Majesty," protested the Finn, cringing and turning away.

"Nothing like this ever happened before you came here," answered the king. "I believe it is you yourself who has bewitched my banquet, and made me the laughing-stock for my neighbors. Whip this man," he added angrily. "We shall see if he can't remember how my feast came to disappear."

In Viking times, a king could of course judge and punish offenders at his little court. But in his anger Halfdan was about to punish a man before he was really judged guilty. The ten-year-old Prince Harald watched the slave wield the whip over the shoulders of the trembling man.

"Father," cried the lad, "don't whip this man!"

"What does this mean?" exclaimed the king.

"Does a son of mine pretend to defend a magician who has tricked me?"

"But you do not know that he stole the food," protested the boy. "He says he didn't take it."

"I will hear nothing more from you," cried the king angrily. "Take care that you yourself don't deserve a whipping."

Harald was a true son of his father in spirit. His face became white with anger, but he clenched his fists and said nothing further. The punishment of the Finn proceeded, but when he would reveal nothing, he was bound and thrown into a wretched outhouse to spend the night. As the night waned, the Finn heard a noise in the room. He tried to rise, for he thought perhaps the king had sent some one to kill him.

"I have come to help you," whispered a voice, and the Finn felt a hand, the hand of the little prince, on his shoulder. "Now you must fly!" said the boy as he helped the Finn loosen his bonds. "But you must take me with you, as I will no longer stay at home with my cruel father."

There was consternation in the household of King Halfdan the next morning, for not only had the Finnish magician disappeared, but the king's own son was missing.

"It is more of his cursed enchantment!" cried the king, raging. But Queen Ragnhild sent out searching parties to see if some trace of her son



"I have come to help you," whispered a voice.





could be found. When they returned without news of the lost boy, she wept silently in her chamber. Her blue-eyed, fair-haired son was her greatest joy in life and she had hoped great things for him.

The prince and the magician, disguised as ordinary wayfarers, traveled through the land until finally they came to the house of a chieftain who was expecting a number of guests for a house party. There was need for help in the preparations and the two strangers found ready employment. Here they made friends and became a part of the lord's household without revealing their identities. Thus the winter passed and the spring came.

One day the magician called Prince Harald to him.

"My boy," said he, laying his hand on the little fellow's head, "you did me a good turn. I could not repay you before, nor could I well tell you the truth, for it was I, after all, who took the food from your father's table. Now your father is dead. And I prophesy great things for you. May you live long as his heir—and not only that, but as king over the whole land of Norway, where no king has ever reigned before. To-day you must return to inherit your kingdom!"

The young lad heard the magician's words with mingled feelings. He regretted his attitude to-

ward his father and was both angry at the Finn for his deceit and grateful for his glowing promises. But most of all was he glad to be able to return to his noble mother, Queen Ragnhild, and the kingdom that awaited him.

King Halfdan with a company of retainers had driven across the ice to visit friends on the other side of the fiord. The spring had loosened the ice and when the company drove near a water-hole where the cattle always came to drink, the surface gave way. One sleigh followed the other into the dark chasm that yawned before them. So perished King Halfdan.

Terrible as this catastrophe was for Queen Ragnhild, her sorrow was softened by the return of her son. The little lost prince found the warmest of welcomes in his mother's arms.

When the family attempted to arrange for the funeral of King Halfdan, great difficulties arose. The body was about to be buried when a prominent earl requested that the king be buried on his estate. While he was discussing the matter with Ragnhild, another earl called to say that he thought the king should be buried on *his* estate. While they were disputing the question, came a third earl who said that wherever such a wise king was buried, the crops were sure to be good, so he very much wished that Halfdan be buried on *his* estate.



"What shall be done?" cried Ragnhild distressed. "Halfdan can be buried in only one place, but if I offend any of these earls, they will surely cause trouble for my son Harald, and the kingdom may go to pieces."

So she called Torleif, the wise man, and asked his advice. Torleif considered the matter at length and then said:

"When you say that none of the earls must be offended, you are right. But it is not true that Halfdan can be buried in only one place. His body can be divided into three parts, and one part given to each of the earls. Meanwhile the royal head may be interred in the family burial place, as was intended."

The idea was not exactly a pleasant one, but Queen Ragnhild was a clever woman and saw that it was the only thing to do. And that is the reason King Halfdan was given four graves, and the three earls pledged to support the little prince in his claims to his father's throne.

But there were other chieftains outside the kingdom who no sooner learned of the death of the strong Halfdan than they resolved to take some of his land. Armies were sent against the little state and Queen Ragnhild trembled for her son. The earls, however, stood by the young prince and the would-be invaders were driven back. But Ragnhild was still anxious. There were many

years yet before her boy would be of age and until then he could not formally be declared king. In the meantime the dangers were untold.

Ragnhild thought of the dream King Halfdan had once had and of Torleif's prophecy that a great man named Olaf would come of their race and conquer all enemies. If Harald's name had only been Olaf! But what of her own dream about the mysterious tree—the dream that she had never dared ask Torleif to interpret? At once she called the wise man to her.

"You remember, Torleif," said she, "that I once had a very strange dream. A tree grew in my garden with roots as red as blood, with a trunk of a beautiful green and a top as white as snow. There were many twigs on the tree—all of different lengths and some of the branches stretched to the end of Norway and beyond. You never told me the meaning of my dream. Perhaps you can do so now?"

"You did not ask me, Your Majesty," answered Torleif, "but my idea of its meaning is this: The tree indicates the realm of your son, Prince Harald, who shall become a mighty man. The blood-red roots of the tree indicate the royal line from which he sprang—back to the great god Frey himself. The tree is green—the kingdom prospers. The twigs and branches are your son's offspring—many of them mighty men. These cor-

respond to the locks of hair of which the king once dreamed. The white tree top indicates that Harald will live to a ripe old age and enjoy the fruit of his labors. Long live the great kingdom of our future King Harald—Ragnhild's son!"

Then Queen Ragnhild was happy, for she felt that in spite of all the present difficulties, her sturdy little prince would some day become a great king on a secure throne.

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<sup>1</sup>Ragnhild is pronounced Ran-hild.

<sup>2</sup>The son of Ingvald of the Wolf's Heart (see preceding story) was forced to leave Sweden because of his father's misdeeds and came to Norway, where his descendants founded this little kingdom. King Halfdan is the direct descendant in male line, the sixth generation from Ingvald, according to Snorra, and thus from the God Frey, himself.

<sup>3</sup>Yuletide in those days was a heathen festival.



# V

## WHY HARALD WOULD NOT CUT HIS HAIR

*Prince Harald*

*Queen Ragnhild*

*Ragnvald, Earl of Mora*

*Gyda, a chieftain's daughter*

*Walking Rolf, Ragnvald's Son*

*Hild, Ragnvald's wife*

*Herlaug* } Chieftains  
*Rollaug* }

PLACE: Norway; especially on the Hafs Fiord, near Stavanger.

AT the home of a wealthy peasant in Valders lived Gyda, the tall, the beautiful, the haughty. The young Prince Harald saw the fair Gyda and marked her queenly mien.

"That is no ordinary peasant girl," remarked the prince as he stood gazing after her.

"No," said his companion, "Gyda is the daughter of a chieftain. She is only living with this peasant that she may learn the arts of housekeeping from his industrious wife."<sup>1</sup>

"She is beautiful," mused the Prince as he continued to gaze.

"She is also said to be good and intelligent," answered the other. "But very haughty, too, and has already sent a number of high-born suitors about their business."

Prince Harald made further inquiries about the young lady and before long was presented at the

peasant's house to the damsel herself. He found her to be all that his companion had said—and more. She was not only beautiful, she was charming. And although she was haughty, yet was she modest. Of high birth, she possessed a simple and natural dignity.

Prince Harald came to his mother in a glow of youthful enthusiasm. "I have found the maid after my heart!" he exclaimed. "I have just come into my kingdom. In what better way could I celebrate the beginning of my career than my marrying a clever beautiful girl of noble birth?"

"Quite right," answered Queen Ragnhild, "provided she will accept you."

"Accept me?" repeated Harald, surprised. "A prince of Frey's royal blood is surely good enough for any Gyda, however fine she may be. My record is clean and I have always had my people's welfare at heart."

Queen Ragnhild was a woman of experience and insight. She also knew something about Gyda. So she only smiled and said: "We shall see."

Soon after, three messengers were sent to Gyda with a proposal of marriage from Prince Harald. The messengers were received with the greatest politeness, but when they explained their mission, Gyda gazed at them in astonishment.

"Do you think I would give myself to a man who rules over only a few little districts?" she

asked. "Why isn't there one king over Norway, as there is one king over Sweden and one over Denmark? To such a one I would gladly give my hand!"

"You are very daring," answered one of the messengers. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," replied Gyda, "that it grieves me to see this land divided among small rulers who do nothing but quarrel with one another. The great King Gorm united all Denmark and made it a nation. Would the gods might send such a one to help poor Norway!"

"You will not accept our prince's offer, then?" said the second messenger.

Gyda made no answer.

"You have no further message for Prince Harald?" asked the third.

Gyda shook her head, and the messengers departed. But when they had come out upon the road, Gyda followed after them and said, more gently:

"You may take this word to your king. I shall indeed be glad to be his wife, but first he must unite all Norway as one nation."

The messengers were very angry at the failure of their mission, and Prince Harald could hardly believe it true. Then they repeated Gyda's words. These astonished him even more than her refusal and he stood long and pondered.



"The woman is insolent," said one of the messengers. "If you give the word, we will return and take her by force."

"No!" cried Harald. "By all means, no! This girl should have thanks not dishonor for her words. And now I take this oath: Let the Power who shaped me and rules over all, be witness that never will I cut or comb my hair until Norway is united under my hand. When this is done, I will come again for Gyda."

"Bravely said!" approved his mother, Queen Ragnhild.

It was not long before the young king was given a chance to begin the work he had pledged to do. Knowing that he was inexperienced, a number of neighboring chieftains had already tried in vain to take some of his lands, but now the powerful earls of Mora began assembling an army against him. Harald had made wise laws and had kept the peace wherever he ruled and his subjects were more than ready to help against foreign invaders. Therefore he led a confident army out to meet the forces of Mora, and the leading earls were slain and their armies routed. Harald followed the fleeing hosts into their own country and occupied their lands. But he did not punish the people. Instead he brought peace and order, and all who were willing to obey him were treated as his own beloved subjects.

Ragnvald<sup>2</sup> was the name of the son of one of the earls of Mora. His wife was Hild and their young son was Rolf. Ragnvald came to Harald's tent and asked for an interview.

"I come," said Ragnvald, "to beg for mercy from a great and just king. If you will have me as your follower, I will be true to you and die rather than desert your cause."

Harald was so impressed by Ragnvald's fine presence and his straightforward speech that he made him one of his knights, and later governor of Mora. Ragnvald brought many others to help his king and they built ships to defend the coasts of Norway from pirate raids.

The more beloved Harald became, the more the other kings of Norway feared him. Jealous and warlike neighbors they proved to be and the moment they could disturb the peace or hatch a plot against the fair-haired Harald, they did so. But whenever he defeated any of these enemies, Harald moved into their territory, and it was never long before the people of the land were glad that Harald had come.

Herlaug and Rollaug were brother chieftains who ruled a large province near Harald's kingdom. Most chieftains in those days did little else than make war on one another, but Herlaug and Rollaug were exceptions, for they were chiefly occupied in building a pyramid. Three summers

they had been working thus with stone, plaster and timber, when one day they had a terrible fright for they heard that King Harald was in the neighborhood and they thought he had come to kill them. Herlaug was so frightened that he brought quantities of food and drink into the pyramid, invited eleven trusted men to come there with him, and walled it up from the inside. Thus they were buried alive. But Rollaug arranged a throne on a hill with pillows on the steps. Then he went himself to where Harald was staying and invited him to come to the hill.

"Mount that throne, oh, King," said Rollaug to Harald. "You shall be ruler here. I am only worthy to sit at your feet and serve the most noble of Frey's descendants."

But Harald took a sword and fastened it to Rollaug's belt and hung a shield around his neck.

"Be my earl," said Harald. "You yourself must sit on this throne and see that my laws of peace and justice are obeyed."

Thus Rollaug became ruler over all the land he had before shared with his brother. King Harald bound several chiefs to him by similar treatment, and as earls in his growing kingdom they were much greater than they had been as little sovereigns.

But there were others again that continued to plot Harald's downfall. When beaten by King



Harald and driven from their lands, they went into new districts to stir up trouble. Finally all the malcontents in Norway outside Harald's kingdom banded together against him, for once agreeing on one subject—that he must be got out of the way.

It was really a mighty army that these little kings collected against the great one. They came sailing into the Hafs Fiord with their Viking ships in fighting trim, and there they found King Harald awaiting them. It was a long and hard fight. Many of the enemy were brave and warlike men and they were fighting for their existence, for they knew that if they lost they would have to leave Norway forever. But Harald had all his people combined in one united force, resolved that their leader and his cause should win. The young king dominated them both in spirit and body. He was always an outstanding figure where the fight was thickest, encouraging his men forward.

The bards have been singing the glories of that battle for a thousand years and every child in Norway knows the details of the fight at the Hafs Fiord; how the most valiant of the enemy worked their way close up to King Harald's own ship to try to capture it; how one enemy-chieftain fell and his ship was taken by Harald; how another fled to an island and the armies of the different leaders not being able to hold together when their



He was always an outstanding figure where the fight was thickest, encouraging his men forward.





chiefs were gone, fled in their ships or on foot across the plain.

So sang Hornklova, a famous minstrel at Harald's court:

"You've heard how in the Hafs Fiord,  
Our god-sprung king stood by the cause;  
Great ships came with a berserk<sup>3</sup> horde,  
War-eager ships with gaping jaws.

"Each warrior clad in wolf-skin cloak,  
Their wolfish screams ring on our ears;  
With shining shields they press our folk,  
With swords from France and Gaelic spears.

"They tantalize our gallant king,  
But soon he taught them how to flee:  
Against the foe our champions fling,  
Now see them turn on land, on sea!

"A noble pack! Each shields his face  
Against the stones that 'round him fly;  
As o'er the plain, they, weary, race—  
'Oh, for a horn of mead!' they cry."

The fight is over. Harald, the victor, stands with head uncovered, his long locks—the growth of ten years—falling below his shoulders. His soldiers surge around him with joyful acclamations for he has reached the height of his ambition—he is king of all Norway.<sup>4</sup>

Yes, for the first time in history, Norway is one united land. Peace has come, the peace Gyda dreamed of, and all who will not bend to Harald's laws must leave the country. But where should they go?

Out to sea lay a dim, little-known island, a wilderness of wild mountains, glaciers and treeless plains. In some ways it resembled Norway, but there were no settlers and so the chiefs who chose to go into exile, selected Iceland as their new home. Thither they went with their families and household gods. Before landing, one of the chieftains threw the pillars of the family High Seat into the ocean and where they washed ashore the new settlement was built. They called the place Smoky Bay.<sup>5</sup> Bold and unbending were these proud exiles, but they brought sturdy blood to that cold northern island, and a brave free folk flourished there. Norway was to see more strife when Harald's days were past; but Iceland behind her icy exterior, shrouded in her mists, was to cherish the best Viking traditions for all time. And it came to pass that Iceland's minstrels sang the praises of Norway's heroes for all the world to hear.

Ragnvald of Mora planned a feast to celebrate the victory at the Hafs Fiord. At the banquet, King Harald arose and shaking his locks, which were thick and heavy as a lion's mane, he said:

"See, Ragnvald, it is ten years since my hair was

combed or cut. Now my vow is fulfilled, I have united Norway. So, good friend, I shall ask you to comb and cut my hair!"

Earl Ragnvald had, indeed, no easy task. But he went at it bravely with comb and scissors; as bravely as he had formerly come to Harald's assistance with shield and sword. Harald had gone by the nickname "Thick-hair" among his companions, but when his locks had been tended by Ragnvald's hand, the earl called out:

"What a handsome head of hair our king has, after all! Let Norway's first monarch be called 'Harald of the Fair Hair'; so shall his noble vow always be remembered."

And ever since that day Harald has been known as "Harald Fair-Hair."

But an unpleasant event came to disturb the friendship between Harald and the earl. The cause was Ragnvald's son, Rolf. Rolf was so large that no horse in Norway could carry him and he was called "Walking Rolf" because he had always to go on foot. Walking Rolf could, however, sail by ship—provided it was big enough—and he was an eager Viking. To "go on a raid" in those heathen days was more or less of a gentleman's sport and a boat-load of these hardy souls would often descend on some unprepared village, defeat the men in a fight, plunder the place and carry off the women. As a rule the Vikings chose



places along the Baltic, British, French or Irish coasts to devastate, but Walking Rolf was once thoughtless enough to plunder a little town in Norway.

When King Harald received news of this event, he was very angry. Not only was he opposed to raids in general, but he had pledged himself to defend the lands under his rule, and such an act was not to be tolerated from one of his own subjects. As a punishment, Harald ordered Walking Rolf to leave the country forever.

Earl Ragnvald was too proud to plead for his son. He himself had helped Harald free the coasts from such raids and could only consider his son's offense a most serious one. But Hild, mother of the culprit, felt that the family would be disgraced by this public humiliation and sought to save her son. She came into the presence of the king and falling on her knees begged for the royal pardon. According to a skald who later sang of the event her plea ran something like this:

"Shall a noble name come to disgrace,  
Its bearer banished by royal word?  
Think—he comes of a brave, true race—  
Why so merciless, Lord?

"A dog, driven out, may become a wolf,  
A vengeful wolf, with terrible bite!  
What, oh, King, will become of my Rolf  
If driven out by thy might?"

But the brave woman's prayer was of no avail; the deed was too flagrant, Rolf must go. He did not, however, become the vengeful wolf his mother prophesied for he never came back to Norway. South he sailed, to the coast of France and settled there with a number of followers. The place has been called Normandy ever since, and later the noble strain of Ragnvald and Hild proved itself, for Rolf's blood, through William the Conqueror, still flows in the veins of the kings of England.<sup>6</sup>

Through many years, in a peasant home of Valders, a woman, no longer quite so young, has been watching the career of Harald of the Fair Hair with no ordinary interest. Each victory he has won has brought a thrill to her heart; each report of his noble treatment of an enemy has made her cheeks glow with pride. In Harald's footsteps Peace has gradually spread her mantle over the land and the people, turning from thoughts of war, have devoted more and more time to the gentler arts. The news of the Hafs Fiord victory caps the climax.

"I knew he could! I knew he would!" cries Gyda, the tall, the haughty, clapping her hands for joy.

For ten years she has waited for this day and now Harald will come and claim her as his own.

But the days go by and there is no word of Harald.

The brilliant color pales in Gyda's cheeks. Has he really forgotten her? Or does he wish to show her that he, too, is proud? Perhaps his first flush of enthusiasm has died and a throng of events and personages dimmed her image in his mind.

Still she waits patiently. She goes over the fine linen she has been assembling through the years—her bridal raiment. She takes it out of the carved chest that stands in her room, and again lays each piece in its place.

Her aged foster-mother watches her silently with wistful eyes. Viking women learn fortitude, like Viking men; they do not express their feelings with their lips.

One morning the quiet country-side is disturbed by the galloping of hoofs down the valley. Gyda rushes to the balcony and sees a crowd of knights already dismounting at her door. The knights recognize her.

"A greeting to Norway's queen!" they cry. For these are messengers sent by Harald to bid Gyda make her promise good. This time, you may be sure, she is willing.

So the messengers bring Gyda, with shining eyes, to her lord.

"I come, Harald," she cries, "not to a little ruler over a few bickering peasants, but to the great king of a peaceful land."

"After all it is *you*, Gyda, who has brought



peace to Norway and joy to my heart!" answers King Harald as he takes her in his arms.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The custom of sending young girls to learn the homely arts in some well-conducted household other than their own home is still common in the lands of the Far North.

<sup>2</sup>Ragnvald, pronounced Ron-vald.

<sup>3</sup>Berserks were professional fighters in the Far North, noted for their mad valor.

<sup>4</sup>The date of this victory (872) has the same meaning for Norwegians to-day as the date 1776 has for the United States of America. On the thousandth anniversary of the date—in 1872—the Norwegian poet, Henrik Ibsen, commemorated the event in a poem describing the fight.

Regarding the significance of Harald's work and personality, Doctor Gjerset in his *History of the Norwegian People* says:

"Many features of Harald's great work are clearly traceable to the influence of Charlemagne and Alfred the Great, from whose constructive statesmanship he gathered both inspiration and ideas. His plan of making Norway a united kingdom, and of dividing the country into earldoms are ascribable, in the main, to this influence. But he was not a mere imitator. All accounts of him, whether friendly or hostile, agree in describing him as a gifted and truly great man."

<sup>5</sup>*Reykjavik* in Iceland. It is to-day the capital of Iceland.

<sup>6</sup>Some historians consider that Rolf (or Rollo), first Duke of Normandy, was a Dane and not from Norway, but Snorra's version as here given is still regarded by many as the correct one.

<sup>7</sup>The story of Harald and Gyda is one of the best-known of Norway's saga tales.

## VI

# ERIK BLOOD-AX AND HAAKON THE GOOD

*Harald Fair-Hair*, King of *Erik*, Crown-prince of Norway

*Ethelstan*, King of England

*Haakon*

*Halfdan*

*Olaf*

} Other sons  
of Harald

way

*Sigurd*, Earl of Trondhjem

*Two Magicians from England*

*Gunhild*, a pupil in magic

*Tora*, a serving woman

PLACE: Norway, England and the shore of the White Sea.

### AN INSOLENT GIFT

OF all his sons, King Harald favored Erik the most and Haakon the least. Erik was tall, handsome and haughty, a daring sailor and soldier, while Haakon was a quiet, retiring fellow with more interest in learning than for the arts of war.

"Every inch a king!" exclaimed Harald as he proudly surveyed the many inches of the young Erik who stood straight as a Norway pine. And it was ordained that Erik should be the crown prince and inherit Harald's kingdom. But when the king looked at the child Haakon, he shrugged his shoulders and said to himself: "One can easily see that he is not quite of noble birth." And he was not; for Haakon's mother was Tora, a serving woman to the queen.

Now Harald had several wives as was the custom for great kings in those days. When one is making a country's laws, why should he not allow himself as many wives as he wants? There had been Gyda, the beloved wife of his youth, now long dead but not forgotten. There was Aasa,<sup>1</sup> sister of Sigurd, the mighty earl; by marrying Aasa Harald had made his power more secure in Sigurd's province of Trondhjem.<sup>2</sup> Then there was the princess from Denmark whose hand secured Harald the friendship of that important kingdom. The princess had died shortly after the birth of her son, Erik. And finally in his old age Harald had loved Tora, serving woman to the queen.

Poor Tora! Hers was not a happy lot when she knew that a child was to be born but that the king no longer favored her. Still she felt it her duty to go to Harald. When Sigurd the mighty earl heard of Tora's plight, (his own sister had long since lost first place in the king's heart) he pitied her and said he would help her to come to the king. So he himself took her on his ship. But it was a long journey and before the voyage was over, a little son was born. Sigurd the earl poured water on the boy<sup>3</sup> and gave him the name of Haakon. Tora gave the child a good bringing up on one of the king's estates, but Harald seldom cared to see his son.

At that time a new king in England sent a



courier to Norway's king with his compliments. The courier brought a handsome gift to Harald from his neighbor-king, Ethelstan of England. It was a costly sword with a handle and hilt of gold, a blade decorated with gold and silver figures and many precious stones set in it, so that it shimmered and shone like a rainbow. King Harald was delighted with the gift. He took it from its sheath and waved it before his courtiers who exclaimed with admiration. But the admiration changed to anger when the courier said:

"The king of Norway receives the king of England's gift as our king expected. In accepting Ethelstan's sword Harald Fair-Hair becomes the vassal of the king of England."

"An insolent gift!" cried King Harald, his face becoming pale with anger. In those days it was the custom for a chief who swore allegiance to a king to take the king's sword just as Harald had taken Ethelstan's. But Harald had no intention of being tricked, clever though the ruse was. Most Viking sovereigns would have made short work of a courier bringing such a message, but not Harald. Through long years he had learned to master the anger that occasionally flared up in him. A cold intellect he found to be a surer judge of any situation, and the result of his best judgment in this case was to send the courier away unharmed.

But the following summer, the king of Norway

sent the king of England a present. Ethelstan was at a banquet in London when Harald's envoys arrived. These thirty stalwart Vikings, fierce and fair, made an impressive sight as they filed majestically into the king's presence. The captain of this royal guard led by the hand Harald Fair-Hair's little son, Haakon.

"We come bearing the compliments of Harald Fair-Hair, King of Norway," roared the fair giant in command, and with this he set the child, Haakon, on Ethelstan's knee.

"What is the meaning of this?" inquired Ethelstan.

"Harald bids Ethelstan foster for him, his son by a serving woman," answered the warrior. "And Ethelstan accepts the charge by taking the child Haakon on his knee!"

"An insolent message is this!" exclaimed Ethelstan, biting his lips. In those days a chieftain would often ask some one of inferior social rank to bring up one of his children and the duty was accepted by taking the chieftain's child on the knee. Thus Ethelstan was unwittingly pledged to be foster-father to Haakon, the least in rank of all Harald's sons.

Ethelstan made as though he would kill the child with his sword.

"Kill him if you like," said Harald's spokesman. "You can not alter the fact that you took

him on your knee. And when you have killed him, remember that all the sons of Harald Fair-Hair are not dead."

Ethelstan did not kill the trembling boy who gazed with wondering eyes into the face of the angry man.

Harald surmised as much, before he sent the lad. Ethelstan was a Christian and although the proud Vikings were not interested in the new belief, they acknowledged that its followers were more gentle, by reason of it. And each of the thirty of Harald's guard had a sword hidden under his cape at the left side, so the little son was not so undefended as he seemed.

Out from the hall tread Harald's stately giants, down to their ships and sail away. Not, however, until Ethelstan has actually agreed to adopt the child Haakon. The look of appeal in the boy's eyes has melted his rage and after all he can not but admire Harald's method of replying to his own insolent gift.

Haakon was brought up at the English Court. Manners were more polished and customs gentler than in the Far North where the fierce Vikings still worshiped their gods of war. The Norse lad thrived in his adopted land. His heart was kind, his disposition like the sunshine that glinted in his fair hair. Handsome and strong he grew, and his English companions admired his strength and his



frankness of manner. As for Ethelstan, he came to love the child as though he really were his son.

#### THE FINDING OF GUNHILD

On the borders of the cold White Sea, far north where the world sleeps under a pall of ice the year round, Prince Erik found the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Pale she was, as the driven snow. Black was her hair as the long winter's night. Her lips were red as the holly berry and her gray-green eyes shone with an unearthly glow like the shifting shades of the northern lights. She stood at the door of a hut and watched the prince and his followers as they came on skis over the dead-white wilderness.

"Who are you, strangers?" she asked.

"I am a prince of the line of Frey," answered Erik, "and heir to Norway's crown. My father has sent me out with a little fleet of five ships to see the world. For eight years I have traveled on land and sea, but never before did I see such a beautiful woman as you."

"At least, never such an unhappy one!" answered the lady with tears in her eyes. "My name is Gunhild. I came here to learn the arts of magic for I wanted to know of the secret things on earth and in the heavens, I wanted to read the runes and work charms as Freya of old did in Aasgaard. But now all is changed. The two magicians with

whom I came to study are both in love with me! They are dreadful old Finns<sup>4</sup> and give me no peace!"

"Why don't you leave them?" asked Erik.

"I dare not," answered Gunhild. "They can follow a trail like dogs—on the hard ice as well as on the snow. They travel so swiftly on skis that neither man nor beast can escape them. They shoot everything at which they aim!"

"Where are these terrible men?" cried the prince. "We are famous fighters and would like a chance at them."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed the pale woman, becoming even paler with fear. "Do not talk so. If they return from their hunting trip and find you here, you will have no chance. Why, when they become really angry, the earth shakes and every living thing they look at, dies."

"Perhaps we could hide in the hut and kill them later," suggested Erik, always eager for adventure.

"I don't think—" began Gunhild, then stopped. She was listening intently, with red lips parted. "Ah," she continued, "I feel that they will be here in a moment. Come in and I will hide you."

Into the hut they hurried; Gunhild had scarcely time to strew some ashes to hide their tracks, when two pairs of skis like a flash of lightning shot through the air and the two magicians stood in the doorway.

"Who has been here?" thundered the Finns in terrible voices.

"There has been no one here," answered Gunhild gently.

"We followed a trail almost to the house," growled the Finns.

"You surely have been mistaken," replied Gunhild calmly; "you can see there has been no one here."

"Oh, we might just look around a bit for ourselves," sniffed one of the magicians, eying her suspiciously.

But Gunhild betrayed not the least sign of anxiety.

"Come," said she, "here is some nice fish I have cooked for you. And see this splendid piece of venison. You must surely be hungry after such a long cold trip."

The Finns were indeed very hungry, for although they were wizards, they were also human. So they ate and ate of Gunhild's ample meal, and meanwhile she made up their beds. Now the Finns were so jealous of each other that they sometimes could not sleep, each being afraid that his companion might disappear with their pupil. For three nights previously they had not closed their eyes and they were therefore especially weary after their hunt and the big meal.

"Come now, and lie down," suggested Gunhild,



patting them on the shoulder, but neither of them would rest unless he was sure that she remained near. So she sat between their beds, with a hand on the arm of each, and thus they went to sleep.

All was quiet in the little hut. A pale light reflected from the snow world without, glimmered through the window. Erik, from his hiding-place, could see the slender form of the woman, sitting motionless between the couches. Finally the silence was broken by snores. Gunhild leaned over and shook each sleeper roughly until he awoke. They turned and murmured, and then fell back into a deeper slumber than before. Gunhild shook them again; this time they barely stirred. She shook them a third time, but was unable to awaken them at all. She sat them both up in bed, and they continued to sleep. Then she took two sealskins, pulled one over each head and bound them tightly below their hands.

Through the shadows, silent as a flitting shadow herself, she moved over the floor to where Erik and his men were hidden.

"Come, now is your chance!" she whispered.

Erik and his comrades came from their hiding-places and were startled to see two big seals sitting on the edge of the bed. But they soon understood Gunhild's clever trick and drew their swords.

Slash! Over toppled one seal.

Crash! Over went the other.

They pulled their bodies outside the hut and that was the end of the two magicians from Finland.

After the deed was done, a terrible storm blew up. It screamed and raged around the little hut until Erik thought the end of the world had come. But it had not, and next day he brought the pale Gunhild over the waste of ice to where his ships lay.

The little fleet sailed to Haalogaland, where they sought out Gunhild's father to obtain his consent to their wedding, for on the voyage they had become betrothed. This given, they sailed farther south to the home of Erik's father, the aged King Harald.

King Harald Fair-Hair was now over eighty years old. The prophecy made when he was a child had been fulfilled: his reign had been long and prosperous. When his favorite son Erik was finally returned from his voyage, a grown man and a hardened fighter, Harald thought the time had come for his son to take over the kingdom.

"I have two crowns," said Harald to Erik. "The golden crown of Norway and the white crown of years. Bear the former for me, that I may better bear the latter."

Three years later Harald Fair-Hair died quietly on one of his estates. He was buried with great honors at Haugesund.<sup>5</sup> In the meantime Erik who had been given the title of Blood-Ax, became

Norway's king and Gunhild became his queen. But their troubles were only just begun.

#### THE LEAST SHALL BE GREATEST

King Ethelstan of England sent for Haakon, his foster son, for he had important news to tell him. When the young man stood before the king, the latter gazed at him with an expression of sadness. What a fine fellow he had grown to be! He was only fifteen, but taller and stronger than his English companions. He was modest by nature and his Christian training had made him gentler than any Viking had ever been before. There was a gladness in his smile, a frankness in his blue eyes, and he carried himself with the unconscious pride of an ancient race.

A Christian, yes,—but after all, a prince of the line of Frey!

"I have a gift for you, my lad," began the king. "I once sent your father a sword, but it was given in another spirit from that in which I give this one to *you*. Your father handled the sword I sent him most cleverly. Let me see how well you can handle this." And he put a slender, glittering weapon in the boy's hand.

Haakon's eyes shone with pleasure. He examined the golden hilt. Then the Viking in him came to the surface. With a mighty swing he brought the blade down on a near-by stone. The



rock split neatly in two—the edge of the weapon was unmarred.

“Bravo!” cried King Ethelstan. “The sword has now been christened. It shall be called ‘Kvernbit’ for it has bitten a mill-stone in two.”

With all his pleasure at Haakon’s exhibition of strength and skill, it made him sad.

“Haakon,” said he, “no son of my own could bring me greater honor than you, and I love you as a son. But the time has come when we must part.”

The young man looked at his guardian in surprise.

“I am very happy here with you, sire,” he answered. “You have indeed been more to me than my own father. Why must we part?”

“Because your own father, the aged Harald, is dead,” replied King Ethelstan. “He has provided well for his other sons and there is no doubt an inheritance awaiting you in Norway. There your future lies. There you can perhaps find a twofold use for what you have learned in England. Yours is a noble race, but your fathers have often been fierce and cruel for they worship the gods of might, Odin and Tor. Teach your people something of the true Christ and when danger threatens, may God and *Kvernbit* protect you!”

Haakon the Good, as he was now called, came back to Norway with an escort befitting a king’s

son. He sought first the friend of Tora, his mother, Sigurd, the mighty Earl of Trondhjem.

"Who is this?" cried the aged earl starting up on seeing the young man. "Has my lord, King Harald Fair-Hair, come back, restored to youth?" For Haakon the Good was the image of his father in his best days.

"It is not Harald but Harald's son," answered the fair-haired lad. "The son of Tora," he added modestly, "whom you yourself baptized as Haakon."

"Welcome back to your native land!" cried the elder man cordially, grasping the younger by the hand. "But you come alas in evil days."

"Evil days?" questioned Haakon. "Does not my brother Erik rule the country and are not my other brothers well provided for?"

Sigurd the Earl shook his head.

"I have been told that my brother Erik ruled Norway after my father's wish, and that the beautiful Gunhild was his queen."

At the mention of Gunhild, the earl held up a warning finger. "Speak not of her!" he exclaimed. Then he added: "I trust you, Haakon. I see before me the true son of a noble father, which Erik your brother is not. And as for his pale wife"—here his voice sank to a whisper—"they say she is a witch!"

As Sigurd the Earl had said, evil days had come

to Norway, with Erik Blook-Ax and his queen. Under Harald Fair-Hair, his different sons had been governors over the provinces, but Erik did not like to see his brothers have any power at all. The people of the provinces, on the other hand, were contented with their governors and did not know Prince Erik who for many years had been away from Norway. So the people of Trondhjem said:

“We will have nothing of this Prince Erik, let us elect Harald’s other son, Halfdan, as our king.”

And the people of the province of Viken said:

“Prince Erik is hateful to us; let our governor Olaf, Harald’s son, be our king.”

Thus Norway was divided into three parts, each ruled by a son of Harald Fair-Hair.

King Erik resolved if possible to do away with his brothers, King Halfdan and King Olaf Haraldson. He sent first to Olaf and demanded that he pay certain taxes, but this Olaf would not do. Then Erik sent a mighty army into Viken and defeated Olaf’s smaller force. Olaf Haraldson lay slain on the battle-field and his son, a lad named Trygva, fled to the mountains.

King Halfdan of Trondhjem was not so easily disposed of. Trondhjem was the finest province in Norway and its warlike people were loyal to their elected ruler, whose uncle,<sup>7</sup> the mighty Earl Sigurd, was specially influential. Erik Blood-Ax



and his queen Gunhild sat in the province of Viken which they had taken from the slain Olaf and pondered on how they could get rid of the other upstart, Halfdan.

King Halfdan of Trondhjem went to a feast given in his honor. When cups were filled, a fascinating woman stood by his side and poured him a special draught of mead. The king thought it was a mark of courtesy. But that night he was taken violently ill and died. A messenger sped through the darkness with this word for Gunhild:

"The potion worked; Halfdan is dead."

It was not for nothing that the pale queen had studied black art with the Finland magician!

All this had been going on in Norway, while the despised youngest brother was living quietly in England. It was just after the mysterious death of King Halfdan, that the lad Haakon came to Earl Sigurd in Trondhjem.

"But didn't my father make any provision for me?" asked the boy, shuddering at the recital of all this dreadful news.

"No," answered Sigurd the Earl. He looked searchingly at the fine figure of manhood before him—the image of Harald Fair-Hair, but with a nobler and milder look in his eyes. A great idea struck the clever earl.

"It is not too late. Something may yet be done. Come!" he cried.

Such an excitement existed in Trondhjem as had not been known in many years. The strange death of their honored Halfdan had moved all hearts and a steady tide of anger was rising against Erik and Gunhild who, it was expected, would soon come to lay the province under their harsh rule. Sigurd the Earl, their wisest man, assembled an open-air meeting to consider the situation, and the people came in thousands.

"I have called you together," said Sigurd the Earl, "to consider the matter of choosing a king. For no king is really the ruler of his people unless he represents their choice. Now I have a candidate to offer. Here he stands." At this point the young Haakon rose and stood beside the earl. "Can you tell me who this is?"

A thrill of wonder and emotion swept over the assembly. As he stood there, his blond head bared in the sunshine, Haakon was the picture of his father in his young days.

"Harald Fair-Hair!" cried one. "Our king Harald Fair-Hair!" cried another and each took the word from his neighbor. "It is Harald, our hero come back to us again!"

Then Sigurd explained to the people that it was not really their former king but Harald's youngest son. He told them in a few words of Haakon's sojourn in England and then said the lad would speak for himself.

Haakon stepped forward. In simple words he told them about his ideas of kingship. He spoke clearly and with force, not so much about what their duties should be to him but about his duties to them. It was quite another doctrine than that preached by Erik of the Bloody-Ax. The enthusiasm of the crowd grew.

"Haakon—the good Haakon shall be our king!" they cried. "Down with Erik Blood-Ax! Long live Haakon the Good!"

The news of the return of Haakon spread over Norway "like fire through the dry grass," says the saga, "from west to east, to the very land's end." Other meetings of peasants were held in other provinces and all sent messengers offering their allegiance to the new king, the image of Harald Fair-Hair. Before Erik and his pale queen were well aware, Viken had risen again and declared for Haakon the Good. Erik tried to rally an army but no one would fight for him. Even Gunhild's black arts stood powerless in the all-conquering sunshine of Haakon's personality. At least for the present.

So Erik and Gunhild took to their ships and fled from Norway. Erik Blood-Ax, the son Harald valued most, had proved himself to be least, while the son of Tora, the serving woman, had proved worthiest of the princes of the line of Frey.



<sup>1</sup>Aasa—O-sa.

<sup>2</sup>Trondhjem—Tron-yem.

<sup>3</sup>Baptism was a pagan as well as a Christian custom.

<sup>4</sup>The Finns (or Lapps) are a Mongolian race who seemed to have immigrated to Scandinavia after the Norsemen were already there. They were always looked at with suspicion by the Norsemen and even in the later Middle Ages were regarded as skilled in black magic. Again and again in the sagas they figure as wizards with charmed potions, bewitched arrows, etc., always bringing misfortune in their wake as in the tale, *Queen Ragnhild's Dream Tree*. One of Sweden's most famous Cathedrals (at Lund, which was the center of Viking culture for South Sweden) was said to have been nearly destroyed by a Finnish magician, but in the act of pulling down a pillar, he was turned to stone and can still be seen clinging to the column. The line between the Norsemen and the Finn is drawn from the earliest times. A beautiful Finnish woman named Snefrid bewitches King Harald of the Fair Hair and the sage dilates on the evil results of this marriage. (Denmark's most famous modern playwright, Holger Drachmann, has written a drama on *Snefrid*.) The sagas of the Viking Age help to explain why the northern countries to-day, in spirit, persistently refuse to accept Finland as "a sister Scandinavian country," in spite of a surface culture which some Finnish circles have derived from Sweden.

<sup>5</sup>His grave can still be seen.

<sup>6</sup>Kvern means *mill*. This sword became as famous in Norway, as the sword of King Arthur in Britain or that of Roland in France. "Its hilt and handle were gold, but its sound was better than gold," sing the sagas. "No finer sword ever came to Norway than that of Haakon the Good."

<sup>7</sup>These different relationships are shown on *Queen Ragnhild's Dream Tree*.

## VII

### FALSE GODS AND TRUE

*King Haakon the Good*

*Asbern, a warrior-priest*

*Sigurd, Earl of Trondhjem*

*Worshippers of Odin and Tor*

PLACE: At the Temple of Odin in Trondhjem.

“**T**HERE is but one thing I can not like in Norway,” said King Haakon the Good to his friend, Sigurd the Earl. “The people are worshiping false gods. My greatest desire is to see my brave countrymen give up their beliefs in Odin, Frey and Tor and come to the Christian faith.”

Sigurd, the clever Earl of Trondhjem, shook his head.

“You do not understand,” he answered. “The people in England, where you have been brought up, are Christians. Therefore, you can not realize how deep is the faith we have in the great beings who led our fathers to the Far North from Aasgaard in the East.”

“I should like to bring this question before the people,” answered the young king. “Since they chose me as their ruler, see how prosperous they are! The roving Viking gives up his pirate raids to become a farmer or trader. My people are one free united nation, as my father, Harald Fair-

Hair, wanted them to be. They are ripe for the true faith and as my father brought them union, I wish to bring them the strength of Christ."

The king's enthusiasm impressed Sigurd and he agreed to help bring the matter before the people. Sigurd himself was one of the most devout worshipers of Odin, and often acted as high priest at the festivals when the altars flowed with blood and the silver-decked idols received their offerings.<sup>1</sup>

"But," thought he, "our mighty deities need not fear this new false faith. Let the Trondhjem folk hear of it, if that is the king's will."

Great was the gathering of people at the temple of Odin when Haakon the Good came to tell them about the Christ. And great were their expectations, for this prince of the line of Frey, like his own famous ancestors, had brought only good and prosperity to the land. And the hope of the young king was also great for he felt that if Trondhjem could be won over, the rest of Norway would soon follow. This would complete the plan he had made for his country's betterment and his pledge to King Ethelstan, his foster-father, would be fulfilled.

The fair-haired king spoke clearly and frankly as was his wont, but when he had finished, there was no response of enthusiasm from his audience. Instead a silence—a silence tense with a feeling



of uncertainty. Asbern, an aged warrior-priest, arose.

"You have presented us a most difficult thing, my Lord," said he. "I know your people well—even better than you for they have been longer my people—and I know that I speak for them when I beg you to give us time to talk the matter over. At another meeting we can present our side of the question and a decision can be made."

This seemed quite reasonable to the king and so the matter was left to be decided later.

The next time the populace was called together, there was a gathering even greater than before. It was indeed no little question that was to be debated, for it was to be decided which were the false gods and which the true. When the crowds had found places, Haakon the Good stood up before them.

"I want to repeat my message," he said. "I want to plead with every one of you, be he weak or powerful. I want my words to reach the young men as well as the old, the rich as well as the less prosperous, the women as well as the men. What I beg of you all is this. Take the new faith I offer you—the new and the true! Turn your eyes to the one true God and give up your sacrifices to false ones. You need not sacrifice to appeal to the true God. Only in His honor should you hold every seventh day holy as do the people

in Christian lands. On every seventh day the believers in Christ do not work."

The king sat down. A wave of unrest surged over the people and there was excited talking among them. What a strange God this must be. Did the king want to take their work from them every seventh day? How could the land be properly cultivated and ordinary life go its regular course, if everybody stopped working every seventh day and did nothing? The idea of Sunday had never been presented to them before!

Then the aged Asbern arose and like waves after a tempest the voices subsided into silence.

"We peasants thought, oh, King," said the patriarch, "that when we chose you as our ruler and heard your generous promises, we had actually touched heaven with our hands. For you spoke nobly and we felt that under you we would be a free people. But now we begin to wonder whether after all we have our freedom, for now you wish to bind our ideas and force us to believe in something we do not understand. It is not little you ask of us;—to give up the faith our grandfathers found comfort in—the faith which our ancestors and yours brought with them from the shining city of Aasgaard."

"You know that we respect you. We have been glad to have your counsel and we have agreed to follow your laws, and wish to do so. We will fol-

low you, every one of us, as long as we live and acknowledge no other ruler, if you, oh, King, will only be moderate and ask no more of us than we can honestly give. But if you intend to press the matter we peasants have decided that we can not follow you. In that case, we must elect a new king who will allow us to believe what we will. Now, oh, King, the people await your choice and we wish you to choose at this meeting!"<sup>2</sup>

The vast assembly broke into wild applause. The red color went from the king's cheek. He knew those words came from the heart of an honest man and were the opinion of an honest people. He had not himself realized the strength of these false gods. He was speechless. But the clever Earl Sigurd seeing his young over-lord's dilemma, stood up at once and with the smoothness of an elder diplomat, he said:

"King Haakon has no higher wish than to agree with you. He will never forfeit your friendship!"

Now there was more talking but the tone was quieter.

"If the king means what Earl Sigurd says," went the conversation, "he should come to our sacred feast. We sacrifice that we may have peace and prosperity, which is what he himself desires."

The people dispersed. A clever earl had saved a kingdom for his king. But which were the false



gods, which the true? The final decision was yet to come.

In the autumn, the Feast of the Harvest was celebrated. From all the countryside the people of Trondhjem assembled at the temple of Odin. They came on horseback or in carts from the near-by villages, on foot from over the mountains, or gliding over the blue-black fiord in their boats from the islands along the coast. It was like a big county fair with bargaining, bickering, visiting and feasting. Those from remote districts brought their food and set up temporary households in tents. King Haakon took great pleasure in these gatherings, but there was one feature of the occasion he did not like—the main feature as far as most of his countrymen were concerned—and that was the ceremonial in the temple, the offerings to the false gods and the bathing of their altars in blood.

“What do you think has happened?” cried Sigurd the Earl, as he hurried into Haakon’s presence the first day of the festival. “The people are still talking about your speech at the last assemblage. They doubt your sympathy with their customs and want some active proof of your loyalty!”

“Loyal?” questioned the fair-haired Haakon in surprise. “I could not be more loyal to them as you know. I desire nothing more than that my

people should prosper, but what shall I do to convince them?"

"They are calling for you in the temple," answered the earl. "They want you to preside at their feast like a true prince of the line of Frey."

Haakon had never set foot inside the temple of Odin. He always was present on the big feast days, showing himself frequently among the crowds, but outside the sacred building. Within, it had always been Sigurd who presided.

"What shall I do?" asked Haakon almost pleadingly of the elder man. "I fear I have been too eager to convince them. But now I shall do what you think best."

Sigurd was much pleased.

"Come, then," he exclaimed. "Your place is indeed at Odin's shrine. I shall arrange everything so that neither you nor the people will be offended." Earl Sigurd was promising not a little, but he was a clever man.

A buzz of interest echoed to the dimmest corners of the temple as Haakon the Good entered the building and took his place on the High Seat. The people were evidently pleased. Even the jeweled idols seemed to extend a welcome to the prodigal. As the sacred flame leaped higher and clouds of smoke curled through the opening in the roof it seemed as though an expression of amused condescension could be traced on their crude faces.

Or was it only the flickering light that caused their countenances to change?

There sat Haakon the Christian, presiding over the rites to the Norse gods, just as his ancestors had done back to Frey himself in the city of Upsala in Sweden. Yes, there he sat face to face with an image of that very ancestor who had been worshiped even before the Christ was born—and Haakon denied him in his heart! Was there not after all something cruel, ungrateful in that denial? Frey had been a good and noble man, he had brought great blessings to the people of the Far North. "True," acknowledged Haakon, "but he was not a god and I will not worship him as one!"

Meanwhile the worshiping was going on to Frey and his fellow deities and in a manner such as the young king had never seen. A horse was led up to one of the altars and slain. Its blood gushed forth; part of the dark fluid was gathered in bowls and the people eagerly dipped their hands in it. Sheep, goats and cattle were then led into the shrine and, one by one, slain on the sacred altars. More and more blood flowed forth, the bowls were full. The worshipers stained the walls purple with blood, they bathed the idols in it and even sprinkled it on themselves.

The king looked on with astonishment, mingled with disgust. He thought of his early days in Eng-



land, of the stately church ceremonies with the bishop presiding; the holy sacrament; the bells calling to mass of an Easter morning. The fumes from the carcasses mingled with the smell of the blood and the clouds of smoke became denser until they almost hid the faces of the gods. How stonily they gazed at him; as if they knew of the torture within his heart and secretly rejoiced.

What deities were these that could find pleasure in so much blood? If Frey had really been the noble man pictured in the sagas, he would never find pleasure in sights like this. Nor would Odin or Tor if they had been noble men. But they were only men after all and not gods, therefore the orgy seemed doubly useless. The fumes were choking the prince of the line of Frey; he longed to escape into the open air.

"Now," came the voice of Sigurd the Earl, "we shall drink the toasts."

Through the smoke Haakon could see the leading men gathering around the sacred fire, each with a beaker in his hand. In the meantime the carcasses were being cut up and placed in huge kettles.

Round and round the flame paced the chieftains with their drinking horns held aloft. Haakon took his beaker and stood up.

"To the health of Odin, greatest of the gods!" cried Earl Sigurd, and every one drank his cup

to the dregs. Haakon also drank but first made the sign of the cross over his cup.

"To Frey, God of Peace and Prosperity!" cried Sigurd, and again every one raised his beaker and drank off the contents. Haakon also emptied the draught to his own ancestor but made the sign of the cross

"What was that the king did?" whispered somebody.

"Did you see the sign our king makes when he drinks?" remarked another.

In fact everybody had noticed it and now there came an awkward pause in the ceremonies for there was a feeling that all was not as it should be. Earl Sigurd as usual was ready to save his king from embarrassment.

"Our king makes the sign of the hammer when he drinks," explained he. "Our king believes in strength and consecrates his toast to Tor." Tor was the god of war and his sign was the hammer.

The youthful king was quite as abashed by this explanation as the people were pleased, but the situation had gone beyond his control. He said nothing; only gazed helplessly out over the multitude. Again Earl Sigurd had helped him hold the esteem of his subjects. As for the elderly Sigurd, even though he knew it was not a hammer but a cross that the king held sacred, he admired his ruler more than ever.

"A splendid fellow he is," thought the earl; "we shall yet win him back to the faith of his fathers and away from these foreign gods."

Odin, the Wonder-Prince of Aasgaard, still had magic to use in behalf of his people. Could Haakon, disciple of the new Christ, resist? Another test came the following day.

In the temple of Odin the crowds were again assembled. Their gentle king sat as before on the High Seat and beside him was his faithful friend Earl Sigurd. The humor of the crowd was good. Besides the ample cheer they had been enjoying, the people were glad to feel that they were winning their king from his foolish ideas about worship. Only the king was not quite happy. He was dazed,—he felt relieved that he had pleased his followers, but unhappy that he had not been true to his own ideals.

This was a feast day, indeed. The meat from the slaughtered offerings had been cooked in caldrons and the company was gathered to consume it. A portion was served to Haakon.

"What is it?" asked the king.

"Horse flesh," answered the earl. "The ceremony of to-day consists in eating the offerings of yesterday."

The king turned away with an expression of disgust.

"I can not eat it," said he.



"What does he say? What does he say?" came whispers from the ever-suspicious multitude, and the king's sponsor, the ever-ready Sigurd, explains:

"The king prefers soup to meat. Bring His Majesty some soup."

A portion of the broth is ladled out and carried to the High Seat.

"No—no," cries the young man, "I can not."

"Take just a bit of the fat," pleads the earl.

"No!" says the king. There are tears in his eyes.

All gazed at Haakon. Everywhere he saw disappointed or angry glances. Some started to rise, bolder after the feasting, and made as though they would threaten him.

"Come!" whispered the earl in distress, "this has gone too far. You will have to appease them."

King Haakon, the Christian, arose from his place, and went over to the caldron containing the offering to the false gods. He placed a napkin around the handle of an iron kettle filled with the soup, lifted it up and held his face over it as though he would inhale the vapor. Then he returned to the High Seat.

The people regarded him, astonished. They did not understand. But the Earl Sigurd quickly diverted their attention to the banquet and another crisis was past.

The autumn feast at the temple of Odin was over. The people returned to their various homes

—mountain, island or country. But the confidence they felt in their King Haakon was less than it had been before.

The winters are long in Norway and during the long silent evenings there is much time for thought. So it happened that the peasant on his farm, and the fisherman in his island home had time to discuss their king and the strange manner in which he acted toward the gods of his fathers. And it was just at the time in the winter when the nights are longest that Asbern, the patriarch, called together seven other important men from different parts of Trondhjem.

“Do you know what our king is doing?” asked Asbern. “In spite of his promises he is encouraging this new religion. Now he has sent to England for some strange people called monks who, he expects, can destroy our gods. It is high time we showed this king which are really the false gods and which the true. Let us be true to those who have been true to us.”

“Yes,” agreed the other seven. “It is time that this false belief be crushed!”

A plan was then worked out, just such a plan as might be expected from eight high priests of the fierce Norse gods. Asbern with three of the others set sail on a special mission. The remaining four sought King Haakon who had followed Earl Sigurd to the Yuletide pagan festival.

Many peasants were gathered outside the king's house.

"The king! The king!" cried the multitude. "We wish the king to come out and sacrifice to our gods!"

Meanwhile the four high priests came into the royal presence. Their manner was cold and dignified.

"We bring you a message from the priests of your false religion, oh, King," said the spokesman. "These monks from England are all dead. Their places of worship are burned. The wrath of our true gods through Asbern and our brother-priests, has fallen on these false prophets. What has King Haakon to say for his god?"

Meanwhile there was much noise and commotion without. A sacrifice was being arranged. Already a horse had been slaughtered and busy hands were preparing the carcass for cooking.

"Let the king sacrifice with us! If Haakon will be our ruler he must sacrifice!" cried excited voices.

Even Earl Sigurd could no longer stem the tide.

"Come, Haakon," he whispered. "This false faith stands between you and your kingdom. Come back to the people who love you, acknowledge the gods of your fathers!"

Haakon, the Christian, bewildered and downhearted, went out among his people. And he ate



of the horse meat and drank the draughts to Odin, Frey and Tor without making the sign of the cross.

"Long live our good King Haakon!" shouted the people, rejoicing. Sigurd, the clever earl, was the gladdest of them all. But a cloud had come over the sunny disposition of the once light-hearted king. He felt that the false gods had won.

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<sup>1</sup>When Christianity continues to gain ground, Sigurd's line, his son and grandson, remain staunch supporters of the old faith, as later stories will show.

<sup>2</sup>Asbern's speech.—That such a speech, which stands here practically as it does in the original, could have been made in those days proves the Norsemen to have been probably the most advanced people in Europe, as to ideas of democracy and freedom of thought. Of course, it is Snorra's version but that makes it at least 700 years old.

## VIII

### ON THE WINGS OF AN ARROW

<i>Haakon the Good</i> , King of Norway	<i>Sigurd</i> , Earl of Trondhjem
<i>Harald Blue-Tooth</i> , King of Denmark	<i>Harald</i> , Erik's son
<i>Erik Blood-Ax</i> , Earl of Northumberland	Other sons of Erik and Gun- hild
	<i>Egil</i> , a standard-bearer
	<i>Eyvind</i> , a skald
	<i>Gunhild</i> , the Witch-Queen

PLACE: Norway, Northumberland and Denmark.

ON the wings of an arrow went the call for war! The tiny weapons passed from hand to hand until all Norway knew by this sign that their good King Haakon was in need. On the wings of another arrow Death came riding through the air.

Spare your mark, pale Gunhild, there is not another such as he in all the Far North. But Gunhild, the Witch-Queen, has poisoned the dart that she hopes will destroy King Haakon.

"We must have back our kingdom of Norway!" cried Gunhild to her husband Erik Blood-Ax in their castle in Northumberland. "Even though the people have chosen your brother, you are their rightful king."

"But why are you not contented here?" questioned the exiled ruler. "The King of England has given us this rich province on condition that

I help him defend his kingdom. That is task enough for one warrior."

"If you help England's monarch, let him help us to recover Norway!" persisted the lady. "An exiled queen can not be content to remain an earl's wife."

"Remember that England's king is also a friend of my brother in Norway," remonstrated Erik. "Be careful lest we lose what we already have."

But Gunhild continued to pine for her lost glories in Norway. In the evenings she would gather her eight growing children around her and tell tales of the beautiful province of Trondhjem lying by the deep blue fiord in the shadow of the snow-capped mountains.

"That is your kingdom," she would say to her seven sons. "There we shall find you a dower," she would say to her daughter.

And thus they grew up to believe that Norway was their rightful inheritance and longed to return there.

Meanwhile Gunhild goaded her husband, complaining that the family were poorly provided against the future.

"An earldom may be well enough for you and me," she repeated, "but what about our children who are growing up?"

Erik Blood-Ax was a hard man, but Gunhild, his pale witch-wife, knew how to bend him. To



increase her riches, Erik sailed out to strange lands, raided villages and brought back chests of booty, when he really should have been helping the king of England. The latter was a Christian and did not believe in wanton Viking raids, but although the earl and his wife also professed to be of the same faith, they regarded raiding as a proper gentleman's sport.

"And a very useful custom it is!" thought Gunhild, as she sat safely in her Northumberland castle and went over the piles of loot accumulating there.

But Erik Blood-Ax went on one raid too many. While he was away, a new king came to England's throne and he sent word to the lawless earl and his scheming wife that they must leave the country. Erik's reply was to raid an English town. He realized his folly too late. His force was insufficient. The people united against the invader. Defeat. The Bloody Ax had been wielded for the last time!

Back to Northumberland sailed Erik's defeated fleet and even Gunhild, the Witch-Queen, was overcome by the dreadful news of her husband's death. The fine castle could be hers no longer; she had carried her game too far; ah, had she only been content with the earldom! Now she was again an exile and this time without her war-like Erik's support—and with eight children!

But she had at least the hoarded wealth from her husband's raids as well as a goodly sum of money she had drained from the people with heavy taxes. These must be got aboard her ships at once. The new king of England would soon be sending after them and her. But he would send in vain!

It was only a matter of hours before Gunhild was at sea, herself commander of her husband's reckless crew. The treasure had been loaded aboard; her children were all with her. They sailed and sailed until they came to the Orkney Islands.

A chieftain who saw the little fleet enter the harbor sent his son to inquire about the newcomers. A beautiful young girl met him on the shore—it was Gunhild's daughter with the black hair, red lips and all the fascinating paleness of her mother as she had been when Erik first met her by the shores of the cold White Sea. The chieftain's son was quite as charmed as Erik had been. The party had hardly more than been received at the chieftain's farm than the young man begged for the daughter's hand. Here was unexpected assistance. The matter was finally arranged to everybody's satisfaction and Gunhild with her seven sons set sail for Denmark.

The king of Denmark was called Blue-Tooth.<sup>1</sup> He was a very famous person, ambitious and

crafty, and Gunhild had her reasons for seeking his protection. She knew where she could use her charms to the best advantage. Those gray-green eyes, those slender white hands and that clever tongue could persuade almost any mere man that their owner was a very worthy person. So why not try Blue-Tooth, the most powerful king in the Far North?

It was not long before the Lady Gunhild was again installed in a fine castle. Her sons were treated like princely guests and given tutors at the court. They were all handsome like their father and clever like their mother. They made a fine impression. That their father had been cruel and that their mother was a witch—these were things that didn't show in them—all at once. King Blue-Tooth took a special fancy to Gunhild's third son, Harald, and finally adopted him.

It happened as before. Fortune no sooner smiled on the exiled queen, than she began to long for still better things. Norway was her lost kingdom,—why should she be dependent on the charity of any foreign king? She satisfied her longing by telling her sons tales of Trondhjem and stimulating their fancy and avarice.

"Norway is *your* kingdom!" she would cry, clenching her small hands and rising in her enthusiasm. "Woe be to your uncle who has taken it from you!"



As the sons grew older they began to take the matter seriously.

"Why indeed should our mother sit here, a dependent," said they, "when we could perhaps avenge her disgrace."

They talked about it to their friends. Warriors who happened to seek those shores were also told about the matter and having once discussed it with Gunhild, each was quite sure that she was a much-wronged lady. Thus a considerable number of people began to take the pale queen's interests very much to heart.

The uncle of the exiled princes was meanwhile having difficulties at home. Haakon, King of Norway, was a good Christian and had tried to convert the people to his belief but had failed. Instead, the pagan worshipers at Trondhjem had forced him to sacrifice to their own gods, and in chagrin he had retired to another province to live.

Then came the news. An army of Gunhild's retainers had sailed over from Denmark and conquered the province of Viken in Norway. The governor of Viken had fled<sup>2</sup> and the army was already on its way north to capture Trondhjem with one of Gunhild's sons as leader.

Gunhild herself was not with the army. No, indeed. She expected her side to win, of course, but if they *should* happen to lose, it would be intoler-

able to be a captive in a land where one had been queen!

On the wings of an arrow went out the call to arms. That was the custom in the Far North; the tiny weapons were passed from hand to hand until all Norway knew that their king was in danger and rose to support him. Even the inhabitants of Trondhjem mustered under the leadership of the pagan Earl Sigurd to defend the king who had brought prosperity to the land. Religious differences were forgotten.

Gunhild's sons had been brought up to believe their uncle to be a wicked person and thought it would not be difficult to regain the lost kingdom. But they soon found that the people were true to Haakon while they called Gunhild "the Witch-Queen." It was a hard blow—not only to their dreams but to their army. Gunhild's forces were absolutely beaten. Her second son lay dead on the battle-field, while the others hurried back with the bitter news.

"Norway shall be ours, Haakon's day of defeat will come!" cried the disappointed woman, clenching her small white hands. But for the present there was nothing more to do about it.

King Haakon had been completely surprised at this attack. He had practically forgotten all about Gunhild and her children, being absorbed by his other interests. But now it was plain that he must

be on his guard. The arrow system had saved the country but it had taken weeks before the whole land had received the message, for Norway stretches over a great distance and many districts are made more inaccessible by the high mountains. Haakon therefore arranged another system of signals which was an improvement over the arrow method. This was by fires. A fire lighted on one mountain could send its light to another mountain much quicker than the arrows could travel. From this mountain the message could be communicated to one farther on by another fire. It was discovered that in seven days the whole country could be called to arms by means of the fire-signals, and so it was arranged that if another attack was ever made from any direction, this system should be started to summon the other parts of the land to assist. It seemed a splendid idea.<sup>3</sup>

The people of Norway returned to the peaceful pursuits which they had been learning to follow under Haakon's benevolent rule. They did not however feel at ease as before. They had become uncomfortably aware of the pale, designing witch-queen and they feared her more now that they realized she had six stalwart sons to help her. When would the next attempt be made? All eyes and thoughts turned toward Denmark. Gunhild was there, they knew. Gunhild and her sons.

One morning a strange fleet was seen in the mists



off the coast. The report spread through the near-by district and the excitement was tremendous. So Gunhild would again attempt to regain her kingdom? A mighty pyre was erected on the highest hill and the warning was passed on by the inhabitants farther north who lighted another fire. With the swiftness of the fire-light, the message spread over the land and in seven days the whole country was again arming itself, and legions from the different provinces were swarming down the fiords and over the mountain passes to support King Haakon. But Haakon did not need their support! The mysterious fleet had been nothing more than a few fishing boats in a fog. It had been a false alarm. However, it was no easy thing to stop the movement once started. New legions constantly assembled along the sea, only to be informed that there was no occasion for alarm. It was altogether a stupid affair.

The legions disbanded; the sturdy yeomen returned to their homes. But they had not long been occupied with their peaceful pursuits before the warning fires were again blazing from hill to hill. Again the excitement. Again the arming of the whole population, with legions collecting along the coast to protect the country from attack. And again the fiasco. Another nervous person thought he had seen an enemy fleet where no enemy fleet existed.

When the same mistake was made a third time, the good king, disgusted with the misuse of his signals, ordered a large fine to be paid by the men who had started the false alarm. This put an end to the signaling. So the years went by; there were no more danger messages flashed from mountain to mountain and no need of them. Thus Gunhild and her sons were gradually again forgotten.

But Gunhild had not forgotten Norway. She longed for her lost honors but she knew enough to bide her time. While she heard that the country was on the lookout for an attack, she made none. As soon as she heard that she was being forgotten in her home land, she began to agitate for another invasion.

This time she even enlisted King Blue-Tooth's help. A whole army of Danes was placed at the charming lady's disposition. And one fine day a tremendous force stood as if by magic on Norway's coast under the leadership of Gunhild's oldest son! The inhabitants of the nearest fishing village fled in terror. There was not even time to build a fire, for those who dallied were soon disposed of. King Haakon himself had only a small armed force with him when he heard the news.

"Shall we not sail north until we can assemble some kind of an army?" he asked of the leader of the guard that always surrounded him.

Then Egil, an aged standard-bearer, spoke:





The warning fires were again blazing from hill to hill.





"Many a fight have I fought by the side of your father, Harald Fair-Hair, oh, King. Sometimes he fought with a larger force, sometimes with a smaller, but he always won. Never did he ask his friends whether he should fly! Therefore, we would rather not give *you* such advice. For twenty years you have ruled us as a brave chieftain. Every one will support you. Let us make a stand."

The others agreed and so out sped the war arrows as of old—to assemble as many as could be reached before Gunhild's army attacked them.

Gunhild's sons had expected to take their uncle completely by surprise, but by the time both sides were ranged up in battle array King Haakon had assembled a considerable force. Still the legion that came swarming from Gunhild's twenty ships numbered many more trained fighting men, and the prospects did not look bright for Norway's king.

The enemy attacked fiercely and Haakon's force must give way. Gunhild's sons followed eagerly. Confident of an easy victory, and advancing over the plain, they came quite a distance from their ships.

Suddenly at the top of a hill, to the right of the contending forces, came a row of waving banners flashing the colors of King Haakon. This was most unexpected, for a force with so many standard-bearers could cut off Gunhild's army from its

ships and attack it in the rear. Gunhild's eldest son, Gamla, who was a daring leader, directed his attention to the newcomers and advanced toward the hill. But the Danes in his army did not understand the maneuver and fell back to their ships.

Gamla led a charge up the hill but on reaching the top he discovered he had been tricked. The waving banners were borne by ten men only; there was no army behind them. But the old warrior Egil who had planned the ruse, rushed on the surprised Gamla and gave him his death blow.

"Ah," cried Egil, the old pagan, "I feared I should die of old age in my bed while the long peace lasted. Greater is the honor to follow my lord and fall in the fight."

And Egil gained the coveted death of a Viking—to die in battle—for Gamla also dealt him his death blow.

In the meantime King Haakon came between the divided army of Gamla and easily routed the part that had followed him up the hill. Now came a wild flight, but all Gunhild's sons, save Gamla, reached the boats, and though defeated, sailed back to Denmark and Gunhild.

When her sons returned to their pale queen-mother, they saw streaks of gray in her raven locks. "Defeated?" she cried. "And Gamla fallen? It is not possible!" She mused long over the tidings, silent with clenched white hands. "Well," she ex-



claimed at last, "I have still five sons—and Norway *shall* be mine!"

Six years went by—peaceful years for Norway and again all fear of the witch-queen, Gunhild, died away. During those six years Gunhild was watching her next oldest boy and having him trained in all the arts of war. This third son was Harald, most promising of them all and the favorite of King Blue-Tooth. When Harald finally became the hardened leader Gunhild wanted, her standard was again set up, and, strangely enough, a greater force of admirers flocked around it than before. But this time, the witch-queen was not trusting alone to the force of arms; the black arts were to be summoned. With the army went a trusted page who carried an arrow dipped in a mysterious and deadly poison.

One day while King Haakon sat at breakfast, his watchmen on a near-by cliff saw a strange fleet loom out of the mists. Nothing, however, caused so great displeasure to their lord as a false alarm, and the watchmen were afraid to tell him. Instead, therefore, they informed Eyvind, the court bard who had been entertaining the company, and he quickly put the news into a song.

Haakon ordered the table at once removed and went himself to the cliff from whence he saw a mighty array of Viking ships. Once more the winged arrows passed from hand to hand calling

all loyal men of Norway to defend their king. And once more the good king soon found himself supported by a considerable army. But this time, the forces gathered by Gunhild were so superior that they outnumbered Haakon's by six to one.

A royal fight indeed it was! On the one hand stood Gunhild's daredevil son, Harald, leading a mighty host confident of victory; on the other hand stood Haakon the beloved king of his people, supported by a brave, desperate and loyal band.

King Haakon is most easily recognized of all the warriors for he wears a helmet of gold and swings his famous sword *Kvernbit*. The fight rages thickest around him and time and again he is in danger.

His best warriors keep always at his side trying to relieve the increasing pressure, but he seeks ever the most dangerous point of the fight. Finally Eyvind, the skald, throws a hat over the king's golden helmet to render him less conspicuous.

Then cries one of Gunhild's mightiest warriors: "Has the king of Norway hidden himself or fled? Where is his golden helmet?"

"Come this way," shouts Haakon, "if you will find Norway's king."

The warrior came and found not only King Haakon, but Death. Now Haakon leads his legion like a superman. Many a Dane stops, startled, to gaze at this triumphant figure, pressing forward swiftly and surely as did Odin in the old

days. Perhaps it is indeed Odin? Some of the enemy are Christians but the very thought of that avenging Norse deity returning to defend one of his last strongholds makes the blood chill in their veins. Gunhild's army suddenly finds itself in flight.

In the confusion, a young page with the fleeing army, stops, turns and draws his bow.

"Make way for Haakon's death blow!" he cries, and sends an arrow singing toward the shining figure pressing after them. The arrow found home in the arm of Norway's king. At least so some say, but others maintain that among the arrows that fell thick as a snow-storm, it is impossible to determine whence the fatal dart came.

But fatal indeed the arrow proved to be. The enemy had fled, but the hero who had rallied his countrymen and inspired them to victory, lay pining with a hurt that would not heal. All known remedies were tried while a steady stream of blood trickled from the wound and King Haakon became weaker and weaker.

He called his friends to him.

"If I live," said he, "I shall leave my kingdom and seek Christian lands, there to atone for my sins against the true God. But if I die here in heathendom, bury me, my friends, as you think best and after your own custom."

Haakon, the idol of his people, the king with the



sunny hair, the glad smile and the noble heart, was not to go from his people to other lands. He must depart, it is true, but he had fallen defending the rights of his countrymen, and so they were sure that he would come to Aasgaard, the mystical city of the gods where Odin would receive him.

Meanwhile a courier was sent after Gunhild's fleeing ships, with this message from the dying king:

"Return to Norway. I have no son and no one has a better right to the kingdom than the sons of my brother Erik. I commend my people to your care and only ask that you be kind and just to them."

With unbounded joy, the Lady Gunhild received the death-message of her husband's brother and made preparations to leave for Norway. It was nearly thirty years since she had left that land a young exiled queen; now after a varied life of adventure and intrigue, she found herself again first lady of Norway, a middle-aged woman with grown sons.

Poor Norway! It had yet to learn that her powers for mischief-making had not lessened with the years.

Meanwhile that which was left of the good king—the physical part of him—was clad in full armor and laid in state on a hill. The heathen rites commending his soul to Valhalla were held and both

friends and enemies, it is said, wept and agreed that so good a king would never come again to Norway.

Eyvind, his faithful skald, described the coming of Haakon to the gods in a song which was sung all over the Far North and is still repeated by the children of to-day. Part of the song runs thus:

#### KING HAAKON'S WELCOME TO VALHALLA

Odin sent two Valkyries bold  
To choose from the god-sprung kings,  
Which, in Valhalla should join his fold—  
They sped on the storm's wild wings.

Haakon, in armor (ever-glad King!)  
With golden helmet stands;  
Beloved of his people, brave and true,  
He goes to defend their lands.

The heaven is like a shield of blood,  
Spears whistle on every side;  
And over the battle where heroes fall  
The wild war-maidens ride.

"Ho!" cries one, as she shakes her spear,  
"The bravest and best seek we!"  
King Haakon looked, and lo! he rode  
In the war-maids' company.

"We fight for that which is true," cries he,  
"Will the gods not let us win?"  
"You've won, brave King—your enemies flee—  
Now, Odin welcomes you in!"

There on the field, so pale, so pale,  
 With a cruel death-wound he pines;  
 When lo! through the gloom a wondrous light  
 From a heavenly portal shines.

The war-maidens bear him gently up  
 And there 'neath Valhalla's dome,  
 Brave comrades greet him from other days,  
 And the All-Father takes him home.

The great Wolf Fenris<sup>4</sup> shall break his bond  
 And the whole world overwhelm,  
 Ere Haakon's like will again be found  
 To rule o'er the Norsemen's realm.

Waste lies the land and many die  
 While others in slavery strain,  
 Since Haakon went to the great Norse Gods  
 And will never return again.

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<sup>1</sup>"He is the first Danish king that steps clearly forth before us as an historical character. His great personality has made itself deeply felt in our development," writes the Danish historian Fabricius. He was called "Blue-Tooth," because he had black teeth. His rune stones are still to be seen. His bones are now walled up in a church pillar on which a crude portrait of him is painted. This church (Denmark's Westminster Abbey) is still a famous sight, being situated at Roskilde, which was the capital of Denmark in Blue-Tooth's time, the ancient Leidra having long since lost its importance.

<sup>2</sup>This was Trygva, "a prince of the line of Frey." See the tale of *The Flight of Astrid*.

<sup>3</sup>Every year on Midsummer night, the people of Norway now commemorate Haakon's famous system of fire-signals by



gathering on the tops of the hills and mountains and signaling to one another with great bon-fires. One can often see a dozen fires at a time.

<sup>4</sup>When this wolf breaks its bonds, according to Norse belief, the end of the world (*Ragnarok*) will come.

## IX

### THE FLIGHT OF ASTRID

<i>Trygva</i> , Governor of Viken	<i>The King of Sweden</i>
<i>Olaf</i> , Trygva's son	<i>The Father and Brother of</i>
<i>Torolf</i> , an aged counselor	<i>Astrid</i>
<i>Klerkon</i> , a pirate	<i>Astrid</i> , <sup>1</sup> wife of Trygva
<i>The Princes of Norway</i> (Gunhild's sons)	<i>Gunhild</i> , the Witch-Queen

PLACE: The province of Viken,<sup>2</sup> Norway; also Sweden and Esthonia.

ASTRID was young, Astrid was fair and Astrid loved her husband above all else in the world. Poor Astrid, how she wept! For her husband was about to leave her to go on a Viking expedition with his cousins, the princes of Norway. But it was not for her own sake she wept.

"Can't you see, Trygva," sobbed the young wife, "that the whole idea springs from Gunhild, the Queen-Mother? Here is her seal on the letter. I am sure she only wants to lure you from your province to do away with you; then she will turn Viken over to one of her lazy sons."

The young chieftain tried to soothe his lady with encouraging words.

"Never fear, Astrid, I shall come back," he said. "My aunt Gunhild has so few friends, she can not afford to lose our support. But if we anger her, she might take Viken anyway."

"Don't trust her," pleaded the wife. "She is a witch and you, a prince of the line of Frey, are a living menace to her sons."

But Trygva was no coward. He fitted out his ship and in spite of Astrid's protests sailed down the fiord to meet his cousins.

Heavy at heart was the fair wife, left behind in Viken. She tried to become absorbed in the interests of the household, but her thoughts wandered out after her husband. She gave herself up to thoughts of the little child whose arrival was soon expected, but even this great event faded to insignificance in the shadow of her ever present fear.

Many days had not passed before a messenger came in haste to Astrid.

"Woe to the house of Trygva!"<sup>3</sup> cried the messenger, "woe to his followers and friends! When your husband came to meet his cousins, the base sons of Gunhild felled him to the ground. He lies on the beach with twelve of his men—all dead. My Lady Astrid must flee for the wrath of Gunhild has fallen on us."

For some time the bereaved wife sat dazed by the news. Then Torolf, the aged counselor who had known Astrid since her childhood, came and laid a kind hand on hers.

"Come, Astrid," said he gently, "we must seek a safer spot than Viken. Think of Trygva's child.



If a son is born you may be sure that Gunhild will want him out of the way."

Astrid, with Torolf's help, gathered together such valuables as they could carry and that night left Trygva's house. It was not a moment too soon. The very next day two of Gunhild's sons came in search of Trygva's wife. But no one could tell them whither she had gone.

Astrid in the meantime set out to return to her father who was a rich land-owner up country. But the way was long and the lady found herself too weak to travel far. One evening the party stopped on the shore of a little mountain lake. When day dawned, they saw an island in the lake and as they feared discovery, they hid themselves on the island.

Here Astrid became the mother of a son. Torolf poured water on the child's head,<sup>4</sup> and called him Olaf after his grandfather. The mother took the new-born babe in her arms and held him up to the gray-bearded man. "My little boy has no father," said she, with tears in her sad eyes. "I place him in your care, Torolf, for you have been as a father to me. If anything should happen I trust you will never fail Olaf, Trygva's son."

"Indeed I never shall," answered Torolf warmly. "You may depend upon me, Astrid, as you have always done." And he kept his promise to the day of his dreadful death.

All through the summer, with its light northern nights, Astrid did not dare leave the island, but when the days became shorter, she set out, traveling by night and hiding by day until she reached her father's home. She did not dare herself approach the house but sent a messenger to summon her father to come where she was waiting. Her father, delighted to see his daughter of whom nothing had been heard for a long time, realized however the danger of receiving her. News of her coming must never reach Gunhild, the Queen-Mother. He therefore arranged for Astrid to live quietly in a near-by cottage, and here she spent the winter, comfortably and undisturbed.

Gunhild questioned her sons very carefully when they told her that Astrid could not be found in Viken. The pale queen-mother was vexed that they had only been able to kill Trygva.

"They say that Astrid has a child," said Gunhild. "If it is a boy, he may be dangerous to us, for he is a prince of the line of Frey."

But that fall and winter Gunhild found it necessary to give her attention to other things,<sup>5</sup> and for the time the search for Astrid was abandoned. Trygva's widow had just begun to hope that she was forgotten, when, in the spring, Gunhild's scouts were again sent out to see if they could find any trace of the unfortunate lady.

Friends came to Astrid's father one evening in

great excitement. It was rumored that Gunhild had discovered the hiding-place of Astrid and her son and was now sending an escort to fetch them. That same night a troubled father prepared his daughter for another flight, for he knew that all his wealth and influence would avail nothing against the demands of the queen-mother.

"I fear, my daughter," said he sadly, "that there is no place in Norway where you can be safe. I shall therefore send you to an old friend of mine in Sweden. I am giving you the best guides, and may the great gods protect you on your journey!"

In the early morning Astrid, with her baby Olaf, her faithful friend, Torolf, and a party of guides left her father's house. The same morning an imposing escort of thirty well-armed men came from the queen-mother to ask for Astrid.

"She is not here," said her father briefly. "You may see for yourself." The soldiers searched the house and farm and spent a great part of the day inquiring about the fugitives. They finally obtained a hint as to the facts. Think!—Astrid had only just left the place; she could easily be overtaken! And so the escort set off in hot pursuit.

That evening some of the hunters came to the house of a rich peasant and inquired whether any strangers had passed that way.

"Yes," answered the man who was miserly and bad-humored. "Some people begged me for a



night's lodging but I would have none of them. They are in the neighborhood, no doubt."

A laborer who was passing, heard the questions of Gunhild's men. On reaching home he told his master how the country was being searched for Astrid and her son. The peasant was greatly frightened. He had just given lodging to some strangers who might be the suspected persons. They were, to be sure, poorly clad and had given other names but the peasant would not risk incurring the ire of the queen-mother. It was late but he went to his guests at once and told them sharply to be gone.

The weary mother—for it was Astrid, disguised in rags—with her baby and the faithful Torolf went on their way in the dull gray morning light. The peasant, looking down the road after their halting figures, felt a wave of sympathy and followed after.

"I must tell you," he called, "that spies from Queen Gunhild are seeking the Lady Astrid. If you know anything about her, you had best avoid them."

"But how can we avoid them?" cried Astrid. "We have no more food and no longer know our way."

The kindly peasant sent for food, and furnished them a guide to show the path. It was now too light to risk going far and on reaching a lake

where there was an island covered with rushes, the guide advised them to hide there until the following evening. They accordingly waded out to the island.

A band of Gunhild's spies met the guide as he was returning from the wood. "In the name of the queen-mother," they demanded, "we ask you about the Lady Astrid."

The guide said that some people had spent part of the night at a neighboring peasant's house but had departed through the woods at dawn. It might have been the lady with her following, although they were not clad like gentle folk.

"Which way did they take?" inquired the hunters eagerly.

"They went in this direction," answered the guide, "I will follow you part of the way."

So he led them forward but in the opposite direction from Astrid's island. Once the huntsmen had found a new trail, they thanked the farmer and set off at a gallop. They sought their prey in vain the whole afternoon, and at night-time were far from their goal. The next day they were equally unsuccessful and finally had to return to Gunhild, saying that Astrid could not be found.

The pale queen-mother stamped her foot and clenched her slender white hands:

"You have managed badly," she cried. "I wanted to adopt the boy."



The weary mother and the faithful Torolf went on their way in the dull gray morning light.





But the child was beyond her clutches; Astrid had managed to come to Sweden. Her father's friend, a wealthy nobleman, received the fugitives most kindly. In pleasant surroundings on his estate, the Lady Astrid, her child Olaf and the aged Torolf spent two peaceful years.

Meanwhile the scheming queen-mother could not forget the exiled Astrid and her son. The more power Gunhild acquired, the greater grew her thirst for power. Her active brain and guilty conscience gave her no rest and as long as there remained a person on earth whom she feared, she left no stone unturned in her efforts to destroy him. The child Olaf was a prince of the ancient line of Frey. Gunhild felt sure that he would be nursed by a mother whose one thought was revenge. Had not she in exile nursed her own sons with the same thought? Her spies had brought news that Astrid was in Sweden, but at first Gunhild did not think of trying to reach her there. However, the fear that Olaf might grow to manhood and stir up revolt in Viken, became more than she could bear. She must get hold of the child!

It was an imposing embassy that came from Gunhild, the Queen-Mother, to the king of Sweden. Elegant gifts were laid on the royal table and a spokesman with a tongue as smooth as Gunhild's own, paid flattering tribute to the king. The Swedish ruler, complimented by these attentions,

entertained the ambassador at a banquet. When the feast was at its height and all were in good humor, Gunhild's spokesman said:

"Her Majesty has just one favor to ask of Sweden's noble sovereign."

"What is that?" asked the king. "I shall be glad if possible to oblige your charming queen."

"A little child has been brought to Sweden by its mother," continued the spokesman. "This child is Olaf, son of Trygva, who was Gunhild's nephew. My mistress wishes to take this child as a foster-son and begs your help in arranging the matter."

"This should be easy to arrange," said the Swedish king. "Olaf and his mother are the guests of one of my noblemen who I am sure will assist you."

And so the king sent an escort of his own men to accompany Gunhild's ambassador to the nobleman's house. The spokesman used his smoothest words in explaining how he had come for the child. The nobleman answered in a similar tone.

"The child is not mine," he said, "but Astrid's. If the lady wishes to send her child to the queen-mother,—very well."

"Never shall the witch-queen have my son!" blazed forth Astrid. "I would die to prevent it!"

"You see," explained the nobleman, "Olaf's mother is unwilling to give up her son. I fear I can do nothing more."



And the ambassador had to leave without the child.

The next evening the family was assembled around the fireside, when there came a tremendous rapping at the gate. Astrid sprung up, grasping her little son, for she had come to fear every noise. A servant opened the door and from the darkness without, there came the gleam of armor. Then Gunhild's spokesman, fully-armed, stepped into the firelight.

"We do not beg this time," said he insolently. "We come to take Olaf, son of Trygva, whether his mother will or no."

With a rattle of spears and shields, a stalwart guard stepped into the room, each wearing the badge of the king of Sweden. Gunhild's clever spokesman had persuaded the king to believe in the witch-queen's cause.

The nobleman was speechless.

"There is the lad," said the spokesman, advancing toward the frightened woman who had drawn her son into a corner.

A gigantic form loomed from the shadows and crossed into the firelight, barring the ambassador's way. It was one of the nobleman's slaves who for two years had been attached to the mother and child.

"You reach them only over my body!" exclaimed the slave.

With which he began making frightful faces and threatening gestures so that the startled spokesman fell back. The Swedish guard made no move to help Gunhild's insolent intruder. It was plain he had little sympathy, even among them.

The slave made more grimaces and the spokesman stepped back through the door, while the king's guard followed him. No sooner were they out than the slave slammed the great gate in their faces. Gunhild's ambassador was defeated. Too ashamed to appeal to the king of Sweden he returned to the queen-mother, reporting that his mission had been a failure.

Gunhild's face was white as death, but her gray-green eyes shot fire as she clenched her fragile hands.

"Every day that child spends with his mother increases our danger," cried she. "But I shall yet live to foster the dear little Olaf!" she added, her blood-red lips parting in a forced smile.

Astrid, the fair, the unfortunate, lay weeping on a couch in the home of her protector.

"What shall I do?" she sobbed to the aged Torolf. "There is no place in the world where we can find peace."

"Gunhild is a terrible enemy," answered her friend, with sympathy. "But granted that one enemy, you have many that love you."

"And none has been a truer friend than you,

Torolf," answered the unhappy mother, taking his great, kind hand.

But it was true: that in all the Far North, it seemed, there was not one place where she, a helpless widow, might hide herself. Like a spider with a thousand eyes, Gunhild sat and weaved her web, with the sole intent of imprisoning one little victim—Astrid's son. And Astrid reviewed in her mind the terrible things that had been said of the queen-mother, the things she had accomplished by those black arts she had learned from the Finns. Had not Halfdan, the Black, died after drinking one of her mystical potions? Had she not caused the death of Halfdan's brother Olaf; of Olaf's son Trygva?

And now her arts were to be concentrated on the third generation—another Olaf, the son of another Trygva. Was it not Gunhild who poisoned the arrow that brought death to Haakon the Good? How that kind king would have grieved had he known the misery brought by the witch-queen to his unhappy land! Even Eyvind, his faithful skald who sang his master's praises, had received a death sentence because Gunhild's jealous ears could not bear to hear those songs.

Night and day Astrid went over the list of Gunhild's victims. No, the name of her little Olaf should never be inscribed among them, not if she must flee with him to the world's end! And so



Astrid came to think of her own brother, the idol of her early youth, who had wandered to strange lands and settled in Gardarika. Why not seek his protection? Across dangerous seas to that remote kingdom even Gunhild's spies would hardly follow. Yes, the young mother would leave Sweden and take her little son to her brother, in Gardarika.

Astrid's protector made every arrangement for her journey. Passage was secured on a merchant ship and a military escort was sent with her. The seas in those days swarmed with lawless raiders that often attacked and robbed merchant ships.

Once on board, Astrid breathed in a sense of freedom from the salt breezes. Every mile the vessel sped eastward increased the distance between her and her dreaded enemy. The pressure of years lightened and the mother's hope freshened with the winds as she held her child to her heart and thought of the new land where both would find a welcome and protection.

Alas, it was not to be! A new danger awaited the exiles. Over the foam came a little ship flying a pirate flag.

"What have we there?" shouts Klerkon, the sea-rover as he points toward Astrid's vessel.

It is a well-stocked merchant ship! The pirates bring up alongside it. There is a brief struggle, but the rovers are a fierce band of wretches and

soon overpower the guard and gain complete control of the vessel.

"Here is a rich booty of slaves," cries Klerkon. "See this strong little fellow!" he adds, attempting to seize Olaf who retreats toward his mother.

"Stop!" cries Torolf. "Leave that child alone!" And he attempts to force Klerkon back.

"Hear the old man!" laughs Klerkon. "And what are you good for? You are too old to be a slave."

With that he strikes him with his ax.

Torolf lay on the ground, quite still.

"Torolf! Torolf!" cried the frightened child, pulling at the old man's cloak. But Torolf did not move. A dull dark stream dyed the venerable beard. A perplexed look of grief and anger came into the child's eyes.

"Mother," cried the little Olaf, and turned to where Astrid had stood. She was nowhere to be found! Sailors were running hither and thither; the cargo was being divided among the robbers; all was in the wildest confusion.

"Come!" commanded Klerkon, picking up the lad. "I shall get a bargain for a sturdy little Norseman like you."

On shore there was a busy market-place where many people were trading.

"Here is a bargain," cried Klerkon to a merchant. "What will you give me for this one?"

"I'll trade you a ram for him," answered the merchant.

So Olaf was sold into slavery.

Later a peasant spied the little fellow sitting asleep by the trader's stall.

"Will you buy him?" asked the merchant.

"How much?" inquired the peasant.

"Give me that cloak and you get him cheap in exchange," replied the trader. The cloak was given and the bargain concluded.

The peasant took Olaf home and there the boy lived many years, being treated kindly by the man and his wife who were prosperous farmers. Then one day came a great ambassador into Esthonia to collect taxes. Esthonia was the country where Olaf had been sold and the people there paid taxes to the king of Gardarika.

As the ambassador and his followers passed across the market-place, there gathered a curious crowd of onlookers, among whom was the lad Olaf.

"Who is that child?" asked the great man, pointing to Olaf. "He does not belong here."

"No," answered one; "that is a slave from Norway."

"How did he come here as a slave?"

"He was sold from a captured ship," answered the informer. "But they say he is of a royal family. His mother's name was Astrid."



"Astrid!" exclaimed the great man excitedly. "And where is his mother now?"

No one could tell him.

"My sister's son!" exclaimed the ambassador to himself, for he did not dare to let the people know.

"How did you come here, my lad?" he asked kindly. And Olaf, inspired by his gentleness, told the story as he remembered it.

"But your mother?"

Olaf could only shake his head.

"After they killed Torolf, I never saw her again."

The great man's eyes dimmed as he thought of his pretty little sister, the playmate of boyhood days, and her unhappy fate. Then he took his nephew to the peasant and paid a handsome price for the lad's freedom.

Thus Olaf came finally to his uncle in Gardarika. It seemed as though the gods themselves had helped carry out the poor mother's wish. But what had become of Astrid, Olaf and his uncle were unable to learn.

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<sup>1</sup>Pronounced As-tree.

<sup>2</sup>Viken, a seat of early Norse culture, was the beautiful and fertile province at the end of the fiord where Christiania, the capital of Norway, now lies. The derivation of the name is the same as that of *Viking*; the word means *the inlet*.

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<sup>3</sup>Trygva's grandfather, Olaf, was made Governor of Viken by Olaf's father, Harald Fair-Hair. See the chart of *Queen Ragnhild's Dream Tree*.

<sup>4</sup>Baptism was in those days a heathen ceremony.

<sup>5</sup>See the following tale—*The Struggle for Trondhjem*.

## X

### THE STRUGGLE FOR TRONDHJEM

<i>Haakon</i> , Earl of Trondhjem <i>Harald Gray Pelt</i> , eldest son of Queen Gunhild <i>Four other Princes</i> , Gunhild's sons	<i>Harald Blue-Tooth</i> , King of Denmark <i>Gold-Harald</i> , nephew of King Blue-Tooth <i>Gunhild</i> , Queen of Norway
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PLACE: The district of Trondhjem in Norway, and Denmark.

A WAY to the north of Europe amid bleak cliffs and bare rocks lies one of the most charming places in the world. A tongue of blue water cuts into Norway's rugged coast; mountains shield this inlet from the cruel God of the North Wind; the gulf stream feeds the fiord and softens the climate and there under arctic skies cherries ripen in the orchards and young girls grow to womanhood, tall, fair and beautiful. Such is Trondhjem, the northern paradise, and such it was in the days when the clever Earl Haakon<sup>1</sup> ruled there and struggled with Queen Gunhild for its possession.

And how Gunhild longed to do away with Earl Haakon! She was now rid of every one else that threatened her power, and she had given the different parts of Norway to her five lazy sons. She had tried to get Trondhjem, too, and had caused Earl Haakon's poor father Sigurd to be burned alive in his house, but this had only angered the



Trondhjem people who chose the popular son to rule instead and would have nothing to do with the witch-queen.

Gunhild's pale face became paler every time she thought of Trondhjem.

"Does Gunhild rule in Norway or not," she was wont to ask her five sons, "when an earl keeps the finest province and will not pay any taxes?"

Gunhild's sons were grown men but she exercised such a power over them that they listened to her words as if they were children. However, they did not see what was to be done about Earl Haakon. Meanwhile the crops were bad and the peasants could not pay enough taxes to supply spending money for Gunhild's sons, so they decided to go on a Viking expedition and rob the people in other lands. The raid was very successful as they chose peaceful coast towns where the inhabitants were unprepared, and when they came back to Norway their ships were loaded with booty.

"See what we have brought you," cried the eldest, Prince Harald, coming to his mother with his ill-gotten loot. Queen Gunhild did not deign to glance at the golden baubles, but gazed straight into her son's eyes, with a disdainful smile on her lips.

"It seems strange," said she, "that you go on Viking tours when an earl is keeping your inheritance from you at home. Do you think your

grandfather, King Harald Fair-Hair, would have done that?"

Prince Harald bit his lip. Of all Gunhild's sons, he was most manly; greedy and grasping he might be, but he was no coward.

"Earl Haakon is no ordinary ruler," answered Prince Harald. "He is even more clever and popular than his father whom we helped you put out of the way. Besides he is young and active, and on the watch for trouble. If we try to fight him, he might unite the country against us and drive us into exile."

"Fight Earl Haakon?" questioned the queen-mother, raising her eyebrows. "Who ever suggested it? I'm sure I did not. No indeed," she added with a sparkle in her gray-green eyes, "let us make friends with him. We may be able to get along very well with this clever young earl!"

It was thus decided that Gunhild and her sons should court Earl Haakon's friendship. A peaceful proposal was drawn up in which Gunhild agreed to renounce her claims to the Trondhjem taxes for the sake of an understanding. The Trondhjem folk were pleased at the suggestion; they were weary of the quarrel. Earl Haakon himself pretended to be gratified. But as Prince Harald had said, Earl Haakon was no ordinary ruler, and for once, Queen Gunhild had met her

match. It was to be no commonplace contest—this struggle for the much-prized Trondhjem.

Now there developed a great friendship between Gunhild and Earl Haakon. The queen-mother, although a middle-aged woman, was still a fascinating one, and the clever earl had real pleasure from his association with her. Earl Haakon himself was unlike the usual type of Viking. Small of stature, gray-eyed, keen and good-looking, he had an animated manner which seemed especially to attract women. He was an unusual study even for the experienced queen-mother, and she found pleasure in his company, in spite of the fact that he stood between her and Trondhjem.

When Earl Haakon made peace with the queen-mother, there were celebrations, indeed! The earl and his followers dined with Gunhild and her five princelings. But Haakon was always careful to see that he had as many followers as Gunhild, and Gunhild found no opportunity to give him a magical potion. Meanwhile Gunhild was racking her brains to find some way to get rid of the earl, while the earl, always polite and delightful, could never be caught. It was a great game. . . . And all the time every one was saying what wonderfully good friends the two were!

It was while all this was going on, that Gunhild's eldest son, Prince Harald, had an adventure. A ship from Iceland came into port, laden with skins.



For some reason—perhaps because it was summer—nobody would buy the skins, and the ship's captain came to Prince Harald, complaining of his bad luck. The prince was a good-humored man—when the good-humor cost him nothing—and consented to have a look at the skins. He came in his royal vessel, and on examining the wares, he said:

“Won't you give me one of those gray pelts?”

“Willingly,” answered the captain, “take more if you like.”

Prince Harald selected a gray pelt, threw it over his shoulder and went back to his vessel. But before they rowed away, every one of his men, wishing to follow the fashion, bought a skin for himself. The skins must have been becoming, for a few days later, so many men came to buy pelts that there were not enough for half of them. The prince had set the style, and from that day he was known as “Harald Gray-Pelt.”

Harald Gray-Pelt's name was soon to be even better known, for his mother had chosen him for a special task. Several years had passed since the friendship league had been formed with Earl Haakon, and the queen-mother felt the time was ripe for another move. The people of Trondhjem were no longer on the lookout for trouble, and their fighting force was disorganized. Meanwhile her sons had been getting a stronger hold on the

rest of Norway, and the different districts were encouraged to keep their little armies in first-class trim, in case of a "foreign invasion." But the invasion Gunhild had in mind was one of her own and against Trondhjem.

Earl Haakon, clever as he was, was shocked when news reached him one day that forces on both sea and land were being assembled by the queen-mother from every province but his own, and that all had received orders to "proceed north." He understood the move, however, and realized that any army he could assemble on such short notice would meet with defeat. A quick decision was necessary and the earl made it.

First he assembled a small force and made a show of defense, but when he had proved Gunhild's treachery, he sent his yeomen home and, steering along the outer edge of an island which kept his sails from being seen, he escaped in a ship with a crew of picked warriors. Along the coast of the Baltic Sea they cruised, making Viking raids on the coast towns. Earl Haakon was, as his father had been,<sup>2</sup> a staunch worshiper of the Norse god, and after his moral code, a Viking raid was a legitimate diversion for any gentleman who had nothing better to do.

And Gunhild came to Trondhjem! The people made no further resistance, and that rich province soon felt the burden of the taxes which Gunhild

collected to support her lazy sons. But gradually there came unrest over the land and the army had to be sent from one place to another to enforce the queen's harsh measures. Finally, Prince Harald took most of the troops over the mountains on an expedition, and no sooner were they out of the way, than Earl Haakon stood on Trondhjem's shore, returned from his Viking tour. The people rallied around their leader; the witch-queen fled to Viken, and Earl Haakon sat as undisputed ruler of the province.

Harald Gray-Pelt was indeed surprised when he returned from his expedition and found his mother and brothers driven from Trondhjem. But Gray-Pelt was a brave and seasoned fighter and had a trained army back of him. So it was not long before a formidable force under his command was again ready to attack Trondhjem.

Again Earl Haakon took to sea rather than run the risk of defeat. Sailing along the outer side of the islands, he came to Denmark and sought the great king, Blue-Tooth. Meanwhile Gunhild returned to Trondhjem, and, with Harald Gray-Pelt's support, felt herself at last firmly enthroned in the province she most loved.

All through the long years, when Gunhild had been a curse to the land, Trondhjem had generally been able to escape. Now this rich community was to feel the real pressure of her hand. Not without



resistance however,—there were uprisings and discontent, and one of her sons was killed by the peasants while trying to collect taxes, while another who violated the hospitality of a nobleman, paid for his insolence with his life. For each death Norway breathed more freely, but Gunhild had still three sons and she herself was by far the greatest curse of them all.

Earl Haakon had no sooner come to Denmark than he created a sensation by stating that he was going to bed for the winter. He said that he had so much to think over that he must have complete bodily rest. His meals were served in bed and there he received visitors. He spent most of his time thinking of his earldom in Trondhjem. He could see that the main bulwark of Gunhild's power was Harald Gray-Pelt. If Gray-Pelt could be lured to Denmark, the earl might dispose of him there, and then he could deal with the rest of the family at home. Thus ran his thoughts. The plan he worked out would have done credit to Gunhild herself.

Earl Haakon became so famous for his think-a-bed policy that people sought his advice on their own private affairs. Among others, came a nobleman named Gold-Harald (he got the name because of his profitable Viking raids in the Baltic!) and he and Earl Haakon had many talks. Gold-Harald was a nephew of King Blue-Tooth and

many of the people thought he had a right to the throne.

"Tell me, Haakon," said he one day to the earl, "do you think the king would admit my right if I put the question to him and perhaps give me a part of the kingdom?"

"I don't think the king would deny you any real right," answered the earl, "but I don't think you will get any part of the kingdom unless you ask for it."

On the strength of this advice, Gold-Harald put the question directly to the king and the latter was naturally very angry.

"Nobody ever asked my father to be half king," said he. "And nobody can expect me to be less than my father."

Gold-Harald was not in a happy frame of mind the next time he sought Earl Haakon's bedside.

"Now my position is worse than ever," he explained. "I have gained no more land, but I *have* gained the royal displeasure. Still I feel more than ever that I have a right to my inheritance. How shall I win it—would you advise trying force?"

"Don't even suggest it!" exclaimed the earl cautiously. "The mere rumor of such a thought might cost you your life. Take stock of your talents. Brave and determined must one be to dare to think big things; neither good nor evil can be spared

to consummate what one has dared to think. The worst thing in the world is to fall short in the action of a big thought."

What did he mean? Gold-Harald himself couldn't quite make out, but he went away to think it over. In the meantime King Blue-Tooth, himself, came for a bed-chamber conversation.

"A ridiculous claim," said the king angrily after relating how Gold-Harald had asked him for part of the kingdom. "If my nephew means this in earnest, I may very well expect a revolution. To avoid such a disagreeable disturbance, I had better do away with Gold-Harald. I have, however, no wish to harm my relative if he will only leave me in peace. What do you think?"

The earl adjusted his pillows and sat up. It was no small honor that the king himself had sought his bedside. He really felt that he should arise and make his toilet before giving an answer, but on second thought he decided that it would be a wise thing to remain in bed. As he wished to appear as wise as possible he sank back among the pillows.

"Well," he answered after a moment's pondering, "I really think that Gold-Harald is in a mood to start a revolution. But why all this strife among relatives? Your father made his kingdom larger and not smaller. Why should you do less than he?"



What did it mean? The king looked most perplexed.

"You suggest," he repeated slowly, "that strife between relatives is foolish, and you advise me to increase my kingdom rather than diminish it. But unless there is strife between me and Gold-Harald my kingdom must be smaller and not larger than it is now."

"Not at all," answered Earl Haakon looking doubly wise. "Can not Your Majesty come again in a few days? Meanwhile I shall try to find words to express just exactly what I mean."

With this Earl Haakon rolled over and turned his face to the wall. The king was very much impressed and ordered his followers to withdraw softly so as not to disturb the thinker. All other appointments for advice were cancelled as the earl wished to have uninterrupted time to give His Majesty a thought treatment. When Blue-Tooth came again he found the thinker looking pale and worn.

"Night and day I have thought continuously about your problem," said the earl seriously. "I have finally arrived at a conclusion which I think will solve the difficulty for you. You, oh, King, should without doubt have all that your father had but meanwhile you might help Gold-Harald win another kingdom which would bring honor to you both."

"How can I win Gold-Harald a kingdom unless I give him a part of my own?" answered Blue-Tooth rather huffily.

"Give him Norway!" exclaimed the earl. "Gunhild and her princelings are hated by everybody. Drive them out and establish your nephew there."

"Norway is a difficult land to conquer," objected the king. "You must also remember that Gunhild and I have been good friends. Her son, Harald Gray-Pelt, a promising warrior, I made my foster-son, when they lived in Denmark."

"Of course I know," replied Haakon with more apparent coolness than he felt, for he was playing his trump card. "But I really thought that you long ago discovered what Gunhild really is at heart, or rather that she has no heart. How she slandered you, oh, King, when once she regained her power in Norway! Has she repaid you in any way for your kindnesses?"

"No," admitted the king. "Her attitude has been haughty and ungrateful. She uses every one until she thinks she has no further use for them. But with my foster-son it is different. He was a clever chap and never did me harm. As a Skiold-ing<sup>3</sup> I do not like the thought of deceiving a foster-son."

"Your own people," answered his adviser, "will tell you that it is better to kill a Norwegian Viking than a Danish nephew."

This was a new way of putting the matter. They talked many hours about the plan, and the king finally agreed to let Earl Haakon untangle the matter. Gold-Harald was therefore sent for and all three laid plans for the downfall of Gunhild and Harald Gray-Pelt. Earl Haakon had indeed found powerful assistance in his struggle with the pale queen-mother!

Queen Gunhild sits at her chamber window and gazes out over the fields toward the mountains of Trondhjem. How clear is the reflection in the deeper blue of the fiord! This is the province she has longed, so many years, to possess—the northern paradise, to win which she has hazarded all. But Gunhild is not happy. Her hair once black as the wing of Odin's raven has turned white as the snow on the mountains. Craft and cruelty have left their hard lines on her pale face,—and disappointment, too. For now she begins to realize that what she sought for most was not Trondhjem—but happiness. And that, she has not found. Everywhere she has gone in the world it has seemed that a curse has followed her. Now there is famine in the land of Norway and she and her three remaining sons are the most hated of all people.

Down the valley comes a crowd of knights a-riding. The people leave their work to gaze at the gay procession as it makes its way to the palace. Gunhild sees from her window that they



are strangers, and, hoping that they bring good news, hastens to receive them.

The message brought by the strangers, who proved to be from the king of Denmark, was indeed pleasing. The former powerful Earl Haakon lay sick unto death in Denmark. The thoughts of King Blue-Tooth now turned toward his foster-son of the old days, Harald Gray-Pelt. If Gray-Pelt wished to come to him, Blue-Tooth would be glad to turn over to his foster-son the estates where he had spent his childhood.

Gray-Pelt was especially pleased. He had most pleasant memories of his childhood in that smiling land to the south where both the people and the landscape were milder than in rugged Norway. There was no famine in Denmark and if Gray-Pelt were there with his courtiers, there would be more in Norway for Gunhild and her other sons.

But it was difficult for Gunhild to believe that Earl Haakon had so easily given up the great game for Trondhjem. She had also once waited in Denmark many years, planning to regain her power in Norway.<sup>4</sup>

"Remember, my son," said she, "Earl Haakon is quite a match for us in intrigue. This may be a ruse of his to get you to Denmark and do you harm."

"But the message comes from Blue-Tooth, my foster-father," insisted Gray-Pelt, who was eager



Down the valley comes a crowd of knights a-riding.





to go. "And it says that Earl Haakon lies at Death's door."

"Why does the message mention Earl Haakon at all?" questioned the suspicious queen. "But you must decide for yourself."

And if he goes, thought she, there will be more for us to divide here.

The following summer Gray-Pelt set sail with three well-manned ships, to accept the invitation of King Blue-Tooth. Gold-Harald had not been at all sure that Gray-Pelt would step into the trap laid for him, and was already planning another Viking raid. The news that Gray-Pelt had reached the north of Denmark put a stop to these preparations.

"Now is your time to defeat Gray-Pelt," said Earl Haakon to Gold-Harald. "Gray-Pelt will think Blue-Tooth is coming to meet him and will not expect a fight."

So Gold-Harald sailed out with his nine ships and challenged Gray-Pelt to combat. Gray-Pelt had been waiting at the mouth of a fiord to see what kind of a reception he would get, but this went beyond his expectation. He realized that he was caught.

Like a true Norse Viking, he refused to fly. Landing his men, he drew them up in battle array. The battle was a fierce one, but went, of course, against the daring Gray-Pelt. He was fighting on

a plain instead of in the mountainous country he knew, and his was an inferior force.

Gray-Pelt may be a hard and cruel character, judged by Christian standards, but, seen through the eyes of the pagan Viking Age, this dare-devil prince seems not a little like a hero, tricked by an old friend and fighting against great odds. One can almost understand the admiration of the ancient bard who sang:

“The Sword-Swinger<sup>5</sup> spoke brave words and  
dared

Color the field with the foemen’s blood  
He bade his men—Swing your swords again!  
His kingly call rang clear and loud.

“The Shield-Bearer<sup>5</sup> who refused to flee  
Lies there dead on the Lim Fiord’s strand  
Oh, treacherous friend, you played him false—  
His noble blood now colors the sand!”

Yes, Gray-Pelt fought his last fight with Gold-Harald, and while his life’s blood colored the sand, the wily Earl Haakon was giving King Blue-Tooth more advice.

“See,” cried Earl Haakon, “Gold-Harald now sails forth to defeat Gray-Pelt and thus win Norway. He will do it almost as easily as I say it—unless *you* prevent it.”

“Prevent it?” questioned Blue-Tooth in surprise.

"Isn't it our plan that Gold-Harald shall have Norway so that I may be at peace in Denmark?"

"But do you really think you will have peace, if Gold-Harald wins Norway?" continued Haakon. "Do you know that he once told me he would kill you if he could?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the king with a shudder, "a false nephew, indeed!"

"For one last time, let me advise you," went on Haakon rapidly. "I have twelve ships all ready to sail. Let me go out and meet Gold-Harald with his nine ships. His men are now weary from the battle and I can easily overcome his fleet. Then I shall win Norway and rule it in the name of Blue-Tooth, King of Denmark *and Norway*."

Haakon had put his case well. The idea of being twice a king appealed to Blue-Tooth and he agreed to back Earl Haakon's cause. The latter now thought he had been in bed long enough; the time for thinking was over, the time for action had come. He was soon sailing over the blue fiord in his fleet to meet the returning vessels of Gold-Harald. The latter's men were exhausted as Earl Haakon had assumed and, taken by surprise at the turn of events, were easily overcome by Earl Haakon's forces.

Now was the time for Earl Haakon's return to Trondhjem. With a fleet of six hundred well-equipped ships he sails away. Blue-Tooth leads a



land force to strengthen the earl's cause against Gunhild's army, but it is not needed. No one in Norway will fight for the hated witch-queen. Not only Trondhjem but the whole land receives the newcomers as deliverers, and Blue-Tooth soon withdraws his army, leaving Haakon as his earl, the acknowledged ruler of all Norway!

Gunhild, the pale Queen-Mother, sits in her castle in Trondhjem, and wrings her hands. She knows that her hour has come. How bitterly she regrets having allowed her strongest son to fall into the snares of her enemy. But her avarice had no end.

What shall she do? Where shall she fly? It is not as it was in the old days when, driven from one place, she had only to come to a new, to use her fascinating powers on other victims. She is old now and faded, and weary of the long, long struggle. The shadows have begun to cluster around her. Such evil shadows they are—the menacing forms and faces of those she has hurried from this existence! There are her teachers, two terrible Finns whom she caused to be murdered in their beds; King Halfdan to whom she gave a poisoned potion. From the mists the good King Haakon gazes at her with reproachful eyes and she thinks of the bewitched arrow that caused his fall; and others—far too many others—the clever Earl Sigurd whom she had burned alive;

Viken's brave governor, Trygva, who was murdered on the sea-shore—and there—she thinks she sees Trygva's wife, the Lady Astrid, with their little child whom she drove from a peaceful life into miserable exile.

Flight! That is the only thing left for the once proud queen. In the dead of night she leaves her castle alone and unheeded, except for those avenging shapes that warn her of her doom. Her two sons have tried to assemble an army, but in vain. The people throng the streets acclaiming their old favorite, Earl Haakon.

And so they set sail for the Orkney Islands where Gunhild had come once long before.<sup>6</sup> Her daughter still lives there, a worthy pupil of her mother, for since they parted the younger woman has murdered three husbands!

We must leave Gunhild here—lonely, old, haggard, with a soul heavy with sin and fearing death, yet unrepentant. The saga mentions her no more.<sup>7</sup>

Earl Haakon has won in the struggle for Trondhjem. Earl he is in name; in reality he is king of all Norway, although he keeps faith with King Blue-Tooth and later helps him in time of need.<sup>8</sup> Norway blossoms under the rule of the earl. It is as though the departure of Gunhild removed a curse from the land. The fish swarmed in the fiords; the harvest was the largest in years, and famine became a thing of the past.

Earl Haakon was a typical gentleman of the pagan Viking school. Crafty, cruel and double-tongued he could be—it was a part of the code of morals as old as Aasgaard—but he loved his people and they in turn adored their clever leader, who had not spent that winter in bed for nothing!

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<sup>1</sup>Earl Haakon is one of the most famous characters in the history of Norway. He was named after King Haakon the Good by his father Earl Sigurd who was King Haakon's best friend and protector. Haakon was a great name in Sigurd's family. The kings of Norway still bear the name.

<sup>2</sup>As you will remember from the tale, *False Gods and True*.

<sup>3</sup>The Danish Kings are called the Skioldings (Scyldings) as descendants of Skiold. They appear as such in the Anglo-Saxon epic, *Beowulf*.

<sup>4</sup>See the tale, *On the Wings of an Arrow*.

<sup>5</sup>Sword-Swinger, Shield-Bearer: These apply, of course, to Gray-Pelt. The Norse saga writers are fond of using this picturesque form of metaphor, as were the Greeks.

<sup>6</sup>See the tale, *On the Wings of an Arrow*.

<sup>7</sup>See the tale of *Olaf in Search of a Kingdom*.

<sup>8</sup>Thus ends Snorra's story of one of the most interesting women of saga times. "The sagas say that she was beautiful and dignified," explains Doctor Gjerset, the Norwegian historian, "though not very tall. She was cunning, talkative and evil-minded—a veritable Lady Macbeth. History places her in a different light. She appears as a faithful wife and good mother, a gifted and heroic woman who clung to her husband in evil days as in good. . . . But it is more than likely that a woman so gifted and energetic, a princess of an old, royal family, might be haughty and over-bearing as queen of



Norway and that, when trouble came, she would fight for her throne, her husband and her sons with all the intrigues and secret weapons which she, as a woman could, command."

The traditional idea of Gunhild as a sorceress seems however still to prevail in the Far North. A Danish playwright, J. C. Hostrup, in his play, *En Spurv i Tranedans*, introduces Gunhild in her old rôle of fascinator. Two young Danes lost in a wood, hear at midnight a strange noise in the earth. On upsetting an ancient rune-stone to discover the cause, the wraith of the Lady Gunhild appears, explaining that her spirit has been imprisoned there for a thousand years bound by the magic writing on the stone. In return for her freedom, she gives one of them a bracelet which she had used in life, saying that its possessor can enchant any one he meets, but that after one day the bracelet will disappear. This furnishes the motif for a most amusing plot.

## XI

### ADVENTURES OF THE BOY OLAF

*Olaf*, a Viking's son

*Allogia*, Queen of Gardarika

*Valdemar*, King of Gardarika

*Burislaf*<sup>1</sup> King of Vendland

*Astrid* } Princesses of Vendland  
*Geyra* }

*Klerkon*, a pirate

*Olaf's* uncle

**PLACE:** Novgorod, capital of the Kingdom of Gardarika, and Vendland.<sup>2</sup>

**A** LAD stood in the market-place of Novgorod and watched the shifting throngs of people assembled there. They came from all parts of the kingdom of Gardarika. Such a display of odd costumes, such a buzz of many tongues in strange languages the little nine-year-old Viking's son had never seen nor heard before. Yes, he himself was a stranger. The busy scene, the animated gossip of the merchants, the stalls, the wares, the animals offered for sale,—all interested him immensely. It was indeed different from the simple life he had always known.

Through the crowd came a ruffian pushing his way; a thick-set man with unkempt hair and clad in a loose dirty cloak. He talked with two companions who wore knives in their belts. Their rolling walk betrayed their calling. The boy Olaf's gaze fell on the trio and the glad light in

his blue eyes died away. The young mouth tightened.

That face, why did he remember it?

"Klerkon!" called one of the three.

That name, where had Olaf heard it before?

The vivid scene with its glamour of color faded from his vision. He seemed to be on shipboard with that Klerkon. All was confusion; people were running to and fro. But on the deck there was a dreadful sight. . . .

An old man, a kind old man lay with his head in a pool of blood. His beard was dyed purple with blood. That had been a friend who stood by Olaf and said:

"You shall not take this child from his mother!"

To which Klerkon had answered: "Listen to the graybeard. He is too old to be of use even as a slave."

Then Klerkon took his ax and slew him.

"Torolf, Torolf," cried the child Olaf. "My guardian! He has killed you—this wicked Klerkon has killed you with his ax."

It seemed as though the whole awful scene was repeating itself, just as it had been, many years before.

Olaf, as he stood transfixed on the market-place, had a small ax in his hand. It was hardly more than a toy, a present from his uncle—but its edge was sharp. There went the pirate who had slain



his guardian, the robber who had torn him from his mother, Astrid, and had sold him into slavery.

Klerkon touched Olaf as he passed. Olaf raised the toy ax and struck the pirate on the head. The blade went to the brain and Klerkon fell dead on the market-place.

Now there was confusion indeed! Buyers and sellers left their wares and clustered around the body.

"Seize the murderer!" came angry cries.

Such a breach of the peace was a death offense in the city of Novgorod.

Olaf tried to lose himself in the crowd but some one had seen him strike the blow and an attempt was made to hold him.

Olaf ran down a side-street; shortly after came an excited mob. Olaf dodged around a corner; the crowd traced him and followed. At last Olaf reached the house where he lived with his uncle and rushed breathless into the latter's presence.

"I have killed Klerkon," cried the boy, panting. "He was the pirate that killed Torolf and sold me into slavery. But now the people are looking for me and will soon be here to kill me!"

"What is the meaning of this?" exclaimed the uncle. "You surely have not broken the peace by committing murder?"

The child nodded; then sank upon a chair, quivering.

Olaf's uncle was at a loss to know what to do. He held a post of honor at the court of Valdemar, the king, but that did not give him the power to protect a murderer, even though it was his own nephew. Besides no one knew of the relationship for he had found Olaf as a slave by pure chance and had bought him secretly.

The angry crowd could be heard in the distance. There was not a moment to be lost.

"Come," decided the uncle hurriedly, "I shall take you to the queen!"

The two hastened through a side-door and were soon at the palace. The uncle, as a high official, obtained admittance at once and in a few minutes they stood in the presence of Queen Allogia. They had, however, no time to explain their mission before the crowd was surging outside the palace.

"Seize the murderer!" "He has broken the peace!" "Deliver up this young barbarian!" cried the mob.

They crowded against the palace gates and only the queen's armed guard kept them from breaking in.

"Why all this disturbance?" asked the queen with marked displeasure, gazing through the window and seeing what seemed to be half the population of the town gathered at her gates.

"Save this lad, Your Majesty," begged the uncle. "He has only killed an oppressor. Later the mat-

ter can be explained, but if you do not save him now, they will kill him."

"It is a great offense to break the peace," answered the queen coldly. Then she looked at the boy, handsome, quivering, who gazed back at her with appealing eyes.

"Why, he is only a child!" added Allogia more softly. "And he has a noble face. It were indeed a shame to deliver up this defenseless youth without hearing his cause."

Then Alloga sent word to her guard to inform the people that Olaf would be brought before the proper court for trial. But this did not please many of them and they complained to the king.

In the meantime the whole affair was explained to the sympathetic queen. She was told how the blue-eyed Viking Olaf had been brought by his mother Astrid to seek a home with his uncle; how their ship was captured by pirates; how the mother and the child's guardian had been done away with by the wicked Klerkon and how Olaf had been sold into slavery. Then she was told how the uncle one day happened to see the child in the market-place and discovered that it was his sister Astrid's son; how he had redeemed the little fellow and brought him to Novgorod; how Olaf after many years again recognized the terrible Klerkon and had struck him with the toy ax that caused his death.



There were tears in Queen Allogia's eyes when Olaf's uncle finished his thrilling tale. And King Valdemar himself was moved to pity when his wife retold the story to him. The other side must also be considered, however, and Valdemar, as judge, decided that the boy's life should be spared if his uncle would pay a heavy fine to Klerkon's friends and relatives.

Glad indeed were Olaf and his uncle that a terrible fate had been averted. But the fine was so large that the uncle with all his means did not see how he was going to pay it. The sympathetic queen, however, said that she would pay the sum, if Olaf could become her page.

From felon to queen's favorite is a long spring and it almost took Olaf's breath away, delighted as he was. But this pleasure was short-lived. Klerkon's friends were still bent on making trouble and when the whole story of Olaf's adventures came out and it was shown that the lad was of noble Viking birth, these mischief-makers again appealed to public opinion.

"The laws of Gardarika," they said, "forbid any royal exile from settling in the land because of the disturbances caused by such exiles. Olaf has been no exception and he should be forced to leave the country."

Again Queen Allogia came to the rescue.

"The law is correctly quoted," she admitted,

“but there is one exception and that is if the royal exile can obtain special permission from the king to remain.”

And the permission was not difficult to obtain when the gentle Allogia appeared as petitioner.

For nine happy years Olaf stayed at King Valdemar's court; for nine happy years he enjoyed the patronage of Queen Allogia, first as her page and later as one of her knights. And Olaf proved himself to be a knight worthy of the patronage of so noble a queen. Fearless he was, with the keen look of the domineering eagle in his clear blue eyes; kind and generous he was, and chivalrous toward the gentler sex. He was quick in his studies and excelled in outdoor sports. In fact all who came in touch with him, felt the charm of this handsome fair-haired young giant from the Far North, whose strength of soul, mind and body made him the superior of all his companions.

One day the opportunity came for Olaf to show his gratitude to his protectors. Gardarika was attacked, the army needed a strong leader. Now came the chance for the fearless young Viking. Olaf was put at the head of the army and he led his troops so well that all Gardarika hailed the triumphant young general when he came back to Novgorod, and the king granted him a substantial income. Whereupon Olaf assembled an escort of

famous fighters and with them stood ever ready to support his sovereign.

But, as often happens when a stranger comes to power or great honor, surpassing all others, there came to be many who envied Olaf and some began to whisper strange things to King Valdemar.

"Watch you well, oh, King," said one. "The Knight Olaf is after all not one of us and if you make him too great, he may turn on you."

"He is doubly dangerous," suggested another, "just because he is clever and makes friends easily. If that kind of a man should sell himself to our enemies—!"

"And what do you suppose Olaf always finds to talk to the queen about?" asked some malicious person. For Olaf and Queen Allogia were often together, as was only natural—Olaf being more than grateful to the noble lady who had saved his life and the queen being more than proud of her protégé who had acquitted himself so well. Great kings and queens in those days often indulged in friendly rivalry as to which one could attract the finest men to the court. Queen Allogia's following was no whit less than the king's and she felt that it was to her credit that Olaf had come from her body-guard.

But the envious courtiers continued their talk until even the king began to look on his Viking knight with less friendly eyes. When Olaf came



into the royal presence Valdemar did not address him in the kind manner of former days but was reserved and silent.

Olaf marked the change and spoke of it to the queen.

"I grieve to see this change in my lord, the king," said Olaf sadly. "But I realize that after all I am a stranger in a strange land and I have had more than my share of the honors that might have gone to native-born sons of Gardarika. Perhaps, too, my own land has honors awaiting me," he added. "My great grandfather, Harald of the Fair Hair, was Norway's first and greatest king. I should like to see the land of my birth and win myself a place in that kingdom."

"Do you mean you wish to leave Gardarika?" asked Queen Allogia.

"That is what I mean, my kind Queen and protector," replied Olaf. "But I shall never forget your goodness or that you saved my life. No matter where I go, I will always remember you."

"Let us first think the matter over," said the queen gently.

The more Queen Allogia thought about Olaf's suggestion the more it seemed best for him that he should go. Out there, over the sea, might be honors waiting for this son of the Far North—greater than any she could help him win in Gardarika. But he must have a right royal ship and

brave men to keep him company. Allogia helped him arrange all this and finally her blue-eyed Viking favorite was ready to sail away.

The queen and her ladies stood on the shore as Olaf's ship hoisted its sails. The queen smiled and waved her hand.

"Farewell, my noble Olaf," she cried. "A good man and true you will be, no matter what the years may bring you." Olaf strained his eyes until the queen and her little group of women were only a white spot against the sandy shore. In spite of his brave start, his spirit was heavy and he almost wished he were not sailing away.

When the ship was out of sight, Queen Allogia returned with her maidens to the palace. In her eyes and on her lips was a smile, but once in the privacy of her room those eyes became dim, the lips trembled. Her bravery was quite gone. Olaf had been like a son to her and now his bright presence would never cheer her more. She knew that she loved him better than anything else in the world.

Over the dark blue waters of the Baltic sped Olaf's trim-built ship. But fair weather can not always continue and the way to Norway may be fraught with difficulties. The Norns<sup>3</sup> had not yet decreed that Olaf should return to his native land.

When the ship neared the lonely island of Bornholm, heavy clouds were crushing against one an-

other along the horizon. Higher and higher they reached like a mighty threatening hand. Hark! The distant rumble of Tor's chariot. A flash as he strikes with his hammer! 'Twas a tremendous blow! It seems as though both sea and sky vibrated with the crash. The gods are not yet willing that the divine-sprung Olaf shall come to Norway—not yet.

Olaf's sailors quickly see the danger threatening their ship if they continue in their present course. Her direction is changed from west to south. And that is how Olaf came to Vendland with his hardy crew.

Burislaf was the name of the king of Vendland. Geyra and Astrid were his charming daughters. It happened that Olaf's ship sought a port in the province which King Burislaf had assigned to his daughter Geyra. When the news reached her that some strange people had come ashore, she sent a messenger to investigate.

"The newcomers seem like men of distinction," reported the messenger.

"Are you sure they are not pirates?" questioned Geyra suspiciously.

"No," answered the messenger, "they are already on friendly terms with our people and seem well-supplied with money."

"Tell their leader that I should like to speak with him," replied Geyra.



And the messenger went out to bring the young Olaf to court.

A tall gray-eyed lady met Olaf in the audience room.

"I have the honor to address the princess of Vendland?" asked Olaf respectfully.

"Yes," acknowledged she of the gray eyes. "And what, pray, is your mission here?"

Then Olaf told her whence he had come and how they were bound for Norway. He told her of his own origin and his longing to return to the land of his forefathers.

The princess regarded him with a friendly smile.

"The year is getting late," she said. "The storms are coming. We bid you welcome to our poor land and if you care to make this your winter haven, we will extend you our protection."

"A thousand thanks, kind Princess Geyra," answered Olaf and a light in his clear blue eyes mirrored his gratitude. "It will indeed be a boom if we may stay here until the winter storms are over."

She of the gray eyes smiled again.

"I am not Geyra," she explained. "But I speak in her behalf. I am Geyra's sister, Astrid."

"The Princess Astrid?" questioned the young Viking, his eyes brightening again at the name. "My mother was also a Princess Astrid. But that,"

he added sadly, "was many years ago. She suffered a dreadful fate among pirates."

"And to think we suspected *him* of being a pirate!" thought the gray-eyed Astrid. "Poor motherless boy."

A momentary impulse made her long to smoothe back the tangled locks and kiss that noble forehead for the sake of that other Princess Astrid who was no more. Olaf's frank manner had assured him another friend.

"Is it the captain of the strange ship?"

A sweetly modulated voice came from the doorway.

Olaf looked and thought he saw a vision.

The purple heaviness of the rich hangings at the portal offset a fair and delicate form. It was a young woman in a light flowing gown that emphasized her slenderness against the dark curtain. Smaller she was than Astrid and less stately, but there was the same freedom of bearing, the same refinement of gesture. And in the presence of that vivid beauty, the deep blue eyes, the halo of wavy golden hair, Astrid's gray-eyed loveliness paled almost to insignificance. At least in Olaf's eyes. Never before had he seen such a being—a woman that seemed miraculously, at first glance, endowed with all goodness and charm.

"The Princess Geyra!" cried Olaf involuntarily.

The vision floated toward him and extended a friendly hand.

"I have heard what you have been telling my sister," she explained, "and I want to repeat her welcome. May Svanevit,<sup>4</sup> god of all good, grant you a peaceful and pleasant sojourn in Vendland."

Thus Olaf decided to spend the winter at Princess Geyra's court. The time passed quickly indeed. Day after day the stalwart young Viking enjoyed the kindness of his hostess, and glad he was, when an occasion presented itself where he could repay her.

Gentle in all things, the rule of Geyra over her subjects was gentleness, itself. Indeed, she often showed too much leniency toward some of her unruly people who mistook this for weakness.

"We can well dispense with this princess and old Burislaf altogether," they planned. "We shall start an independent community of our own!"

Their plotting resulted in a rebellion; the rebellion found Geyra unprepared. And to help her Olaf presented himself with his crew of seasoned fighters to do her bidding.

The young general of triumphs in Gardarika, found it an easy matter to organize a defense for his fair hostess. In fact he was soon acting on the offensive and the rebels were forced to capitulate. Great were the relief and gladness of the Princess Geyra when law and order were once more re-



stored, and King Burislaf himself sent for the stranger and publicly thanked him for the aid he had rendered.

Yes, it was a wonderful winter for Olaf,—the best in his life. And he, the conquerer, found himself also conquered. It was Olaf's first great passion. He came to love the star-eyed Princess Geyra with all his soul and heart. She herself could not but admire the young Viking, so frank, so noble, so imperious—yet so submissive when it concerned her gentle self.

Olaf begged for Geyra's hand.

Geyra consented.

The voyage of the boy adventurer in search of his homeland was ended. He had not found Norway, but he had found a little kingdom in Vendland—and in the heart of a princess. And long afterward, Astrid of the gray eyes proved to be a faithful friend.

<sup>1</sup>This Burislaf in history is identified with a king of Poland.

<sup>2</sup>Vendland—A kingdom in the north of what has since been Germany. The Vends were a Slavic people that spread along the southern shore of the Baltic separating the Scandinavian from the Germanic tribes. The Danish historian Fabricius says: "The Vends learned how to build ships from the Danish Vikings and soon became good seamen. Pressed from the German side they turned toward the Danish coasts. The Vends by nature took life good-naturedly and easily. They were very

receptive of foreign influence and like Slavic folk in general quickly adapted themselves to another culture.”

<sup>3</sup>The Fates.

<sup>4</sup>As told in the tale, *Sigurd's Revenge*.

Svanevit was the great god of the Vends and his sacred city was Arkona on an island just off the coast of Vendland. Here stood a four-headed wooden colossus that was worshiped a hundred years or more after Scandinavia had become Christian. In fact Arkona excited the ire of the Danish kings and finally fell in a most spectacular manner in 1169.

The monk, Saxo Grammaticus, whose historic accounts of earlier happenings in the Far North seem written more to amuse than instruct, describes the fall of Arkona in a vivid narrative which must be very near the truth as it was written at the time the city fell. Saxo says:

“The whole of Vendland worshiped this idol (Svanevit) by paying tribute to it and even kings of near-by lands sent it gifts regardless of the sacrilege they were committing. Among others, King Svend of Denmark sent it a wonderfully fashioned beaker, thus setting an idol above the True God which sacrilege he paid for by a terrible death. This god had also other temples in different places with priests but none as important as the one in Arkona. He had his own white horse and although it stood in its stall all night, in the morning it was covered with sweat as though it had just come from battle and had traveled a long way.

“The city (Arkona) is situated on the top of a high cliff, on three sides strongly fortified by nature, on the fourth by a wall one hundred and fifty feet high. In the middle of the town in an open square stood a very elaborate wooden temple, much honored not only because it was so beautiful but because of the idol within. In the temple stood the far-famed idol—a colossus with four heads and four necks, two in front and

two behind. Its hair and beard were cropped, as was the custom of the people of the island.

"Once a year when the harvest was over, all the people assembled on the island before the temple, offered sacrifices and held a feast. At this feast every one was expected to become intoxicated; to remain sober was to sin against the god. For the money given the god, he had all kinds of jewelry and temple ornaments made which he kept in locked chests where he also kept many pieces of purple which were quite eaten with age."

Saxo tells much more about the customs of the Vends in their worship at Arkona. In trying to take the city, the Danes set fire to the wall, the Vends tried to quench the fire with milk. After Arkona's fall, the dreadful Svanevit was dragged through the city and burned.



## XII

### OLAF IN SEARCH OF A KINGDOM

<i>Olaf</i> , Trygva's son, an adventurer	<i>Burislaf</i> , King of Vendland
<i>Haakon</i> , Earl of Trondhjem	<i>Alvine</i> , an English knight
<i>Harald Blue-Tooth</i> , King of Denmark	<i>Poppo</i> , a Christian bishop
<i>Otto</i> , Kaiser of the Holy Roman Empire	<i>A Hermit</i>
	<i>Astrid</i> , Princess of Vendland
	<i>Gyda</i> , an Irish princess

PLACE: At Danevirke, the wall across Denmark; also Norway and the British Isles.

#### IN DEFENSE OF THE DANEVIRKE

THE Danes had built a wall all the way across Denmark to keep out disagreeable people from the rest of Europe that might want to intrude. The wall was made of stones, tree-trunks and earth; it had towers on it and a broad deep moat ran along its base. This barrier was called the Danevirke and was the pride and boast of every Dane, a thousand years ago. Although "destroyed" many times since then, parts of it stand to-day to attest the greatness of a wise and powerful race.<sup>1</sup>

King Blue-Tooth was greatly pleased that the Danevirke stood between him and the rest of Europe, when he heard that Kaiser Otto of the Holy Roman Empire<sup>2</sup> had planned to take Denmark.

But he knew he would also need all the allies he could muster, for the attack was to be a terrible one. The greatest fighter whom he could call his ally was the clever Earl Haakon of Norway, so he sent for him at once.

"Denmark is in danger," ran King Blue-Tooth's message. "In your time of trouble I helped you redeem Norway; now I call on you to help redeem Denmark from the Kaiser."

And Earl Haakon with men and ships rallied immediately to help his former ally and defend the Danevirke.

Kaiser Otto of the Holy Roman Empire was a Christian, and he felt that his mission in the world was to make every one else a Christian. Incidentally he wished to extend his territory and seize the land belonging to his heathen neighbors. All his strength was now to be centered on crushing the wicked heathen Blue-Tooth, to compel him to give up his gods Odin and Tor—and to make Denmark "Holy Roman." It was a mighty army that Kaiser Otto assembled to accomplish this noble purpose! There were Franks and Saxons and Vends; esquadrons of knights on horseback, and hordes of warriors and archers on foot. Among his most powerful allies was Burislaf, King of Vendland, who was not a Christian, to be sure, but, in the excitement of the moment, Kaiser Otto seems to have forgotten that fact. For the main thing of course

was to crush the wicked heathen Blue-Tooth—and make Denmark a “Holy Roman” province.

Of all the defenders of the Danevirke, none was more energetic than the brave Earl Haakon. While the earl took charge of the defense of the wall itself, Blue-Tooth commanded an army that was to prevent the enemy from landing by sea. For the Danevirke connected the ends of two fiords which ran into the land from either side and it was thought that Kaiser Otto might also try to cross the fiords in boats.

Earl Haakon set battalions of his men in the towers along the wall, but he allowed the greater part of his force to move from place to place along the base, so the men could be quickly assembled at the point where the press from the enemy was greatest. His defense was brilliant. The horde of knights and men on foot again and again stormed the bastions without success.

Among Kaiser Otto's generals was a young, blue-eyed adventurer from the Far North who by the strangest chance in the world, found himself in that motley company. In the first place he was not a Christian; in the second place he was born a Viking and so was fighting his own people. But fate had played odd pranks with this young blond giant. Long before, he had been brought as a child from Norway to the land of Gardarika. Later he had set out to return to Norway but came



instead to Vendland, where he had married the lovely Princess Geyra, daughter of King Burislaf. Now he was following his royal father-in-law to help the latter's ally, Kaiser Otto. And thus two of the bravest Vikings that ever lived were pitted against each other;—the blond adventurer, Olaf, Trygva's son, on one side, the clever Earl Haakon on the other. But they did not meet at the Danevirke. The Norns had decreed a meeting, to be sure—but not yet.

Under the leadership of the valiant Earl Haakon, the wall Danevirke seemed invincible to the forces of Kaiser Otto. After a hundred attempts against the mighty fortress, his weary army withdrew and the kaiser admitted himself vanquished. When this was evident, Earl Haakon, leaving a sufficient number of Danes to defend the wall, boarded his vessels to return to Norway. But suddenly there came a wild plea for help from King Blue-Tooth! It seems that Olaf, the Viking, had conceived the plan of sailing far *around* the Danevirke instead of trying to push *through* it, and Kaiser Otto, in following Olaf's plan, had been able to take the Danish army by surprise.

Earl Haakon returned too late! Poor Blue-Tooth, worshiper of Odin and Tor, direct descendant of the famous Skiold, was already defeated. And more—he had been baptized a Christian, and the whole Danish army with him! Kaiser Otto

had indeed been having a busy time.<sup>3</sup> After capturing the Danish king, he invited him to a Christian conference. The holy bishop Poppo was also there.

"See," cried Kaiser Otto, "the power of the true faith! My bishop Poppo can carry a hot iron without burning himself."

A fire was then made, an iron heated red-hot and Bishop Poppo took it in his hand. Behold! He laid the iron down again without even singeing his fingers.

"A miracle!" cried Kaiser Otto.

"A miracle!" echoed Kaiser Otto's followers.

Everybody else was quite willing to agree that it was a miracle, particularly those who had just been defeated by Kaiser Otto's army. As for old Blue-Tooth, he was so afraid that some one would be asking him to try the hot-iron test, that he was also willing to call it a miracle.

"The power of the Christian faith is now proved," announced the kaiser. "I presume you are willing to admit that."

"Perfectly willing!" agreed Blue-Tooth, his fingers tingling at the thought of the hot iron.

"And Denmark will now be considered part of the Holy Roman Empire," went on Kaiser Otto.

"Without a doubt," assented Blue-Tooth; noticing with relief that the iron was cooling.

Then the wholesale baptism took place. And in the midst Earl Haakon, quite ignorant of what was going on, arrived on the scene! Imagine, if you can, the dismay and chagrin of the valiant earl. His family had for generations been supporters of the Norse gods. He himself had risked his life fighting for their cause. Now, without even the chance of lifting a finger in defense, he finds himself in a trap,—the fighting all over and a general Christian baptism going on.

“You should try it yourself!” advised Blue-Tooth.<sup>4</sup>

There was no help for it. Earl Haakon was smart enough to know when he had really been outwitted, and much too sensible to object to the inevitable. He was not enthusiastic about the hot-iron test, either for himself or his men, and thus it happened that the baptismal ceremony was extended to include them all. Never had Kaiser Otto and Poppo been so busy in all their lives! So busy they were, indeed, that they quite forgot Burislaf, his young general Olaf and a considerable number of other heathen. But then, of course, it is much easier to extend a new faith among a defeated enemy than among a victorious ally.

Brisk winds blew from the southwest and the white wings of Earl Haakon’s little fleet trembled in eagerness for the homeward flight.

“To your ships, my men,” shouted the clever



earl. "It is indeed a rare breeze and may carry us home."

"And a rare chance you will have to make Norway a Christian land," remarked Kaiser Otto. "I have allotted a number of priests to accompany you."

"By all means! Thank you!" agreed the earl, and very shortly several worthy priests were safely stowed on board each of Haakon's ships. But when every one of his Viking followers had also come aboard and the wind seemed steady enough to bear them far on their journey, Earl Haakon's interest in the new faith slackened.

"Ho, for Norway," he cried to his men, "but first out with the kaiser's minions!"

And the smug unfortunate monks were let down from the ships into the water where they must wade ashore. Such cursings the Vikings themselves had seldom heard as the supposedly saintly crew, with gowns lifted to their knees, stumbled over the rocks.

And how the hardy Norsemen laughed at their plight!

But there was little time for laughter; Kaiser Otto and the hot-iron test were still too near. All energy must be devoted to the homeward journey. The vessels fairly skimmed over the choppy sea and before the angry priests could report to their kaiser, Earl Haakon's fleet might have been mis-

taken for a flock of fluttering seagulls; there was no hope of overtaking it.

Yes, Earl Haakon had escaped his foe in the flesh, but he could not escape his conscience. What a disgrace had been his! His family was one of the proudest, one of the most ancient supporters of the Norse gods. His father had himself bent a Christian king and forced him to return to the old faith.<sup>5</sup> With the heaviness of the night, his father's spirit seemed to sink earthward to reproach his son for that denial of their faith. How could he come again to Trondhjem and brave the stern glance of Odin and Tor in their blood-bathed temples?

In the deepening gloom, the cliffs of the shore of Sweden loomed in sight and Haakon, the Earl, ordered sails lowered. With all the dignity of the most solemn of heathen feast days, Haakon prepared to hold a sacrifice on shore, that would perhaps appease the gods of his fathers. As the long red tongues of flame leaped skyward, the Viking warrior raised his hands and begged that Odin, the All-Father, would forgive.

"Only a sign I crave, mighty Odin," prayed this staunch devotee. "Grant me a sign that the gods have not forsaken me and I will atone for my weakness with a costly gift to thy temple."

Out from the dark pine wood came a piercing cry!

The vivid blaze against the blue-black heaven revealed an object in the air.

Another cry and another spot rose above the wood, following the first.

Two giant ravens<sup>6</sup> they were and they flew round and round in huge circles, shrilling their raucous croaks as though they would rend the very air. Then they darted inland and were lost in the blackness of the forest.

"Odin is with us still!" cried the earl with enthusiasm. "We shall burn our ships and follow the ravens."

Then Haakon's men burned their ships and started home on a march, about which many a song has been sung. They came up through Sweden and were attacked by various chieftains, but all opponents were vanquished under the leadership of their valiant hero. Over difficult mountains, across stone wildernesses, through forbidding, brooding forests, they made their way. And finally with golden shields and a wealth of other booty they reached Trondhjem, the paradise of the Far North, where Earl Haakon reigned.

Great was the rejoicing in Norway at the wanderers' return; the fame of their prowess at the Danevirke had gone before them. And Haakon had a gold ring of rarest workmanship placed in the door of Odin's temple as an offering of atonement for his denial of the gods.<sup>7</sup>



## THE CHOICE OF A PRINCESS

Olaf, the Viking general who had helped Kaiser Otto had a welcome home different from that of Earl Haakon. Olaf came fresh from victory, but he found all Vendland in mourning.

"What has happened?" cried the blue-eyed warrior. "I come with honor but am received with sorrow. Where is my wife, the Princess Geyra?"

Then came the tall stately Astrid, sister of Geyra. She took his hand gently and there were tears in her gray eyes.

"Come, dear friend, dear brother Olaf," said she. "Follow me to the palace."

"What is the matter?" again questioned Olaf. "Why all this mourning, and where is Geyra, my wife?"

Astrid turned away her head and wept. She did not dare tell him.

They came to the palace. Profound silence reigned everywhere; there was not even a servant in sight. It seemed as though the whole world stood still in the presence of some terrible disaster.

"Where are all the people?" cried the Viking. "Tell me, Astrid," he begged, grasping her hand.

The great hall seemed quite changed. Something lay on a table in the center. Olaf approached and the leader, fearless in battle, knew fear and trembled. With careful hands, Astrid removed

the shroud and Olaf saw Geyra, his beloved wife, beautiful as ever but oh, so pale. She was dead.

Greater grief Olaf had never known—and never knew again throughout the whole of his eventful life. The flowers of victory withered on his brow; the joy of living was gone. He had come a stranger to Vendland. Without his helpmate the land itself seemed strange. It mocked him with its emptiness. Only one thing was left for him: in the stir of adventure, he might be able to forget.

Thus it happened that Olaf, the son of Trygva, again called his comrades together to follow him out into the wide world. He bade farewell to gruff old King Burislaf and the gentle Astrid and thanked them for their kindness to him during the happiest years of his life. He spent one final hour of grief at his wife's tomb. Then he sailed out—to forget.

For four years Olaf, the adventurer, roamed the seas. Where there was a battle, he sought the thickest of the fight. He engaged in Viking raids on the coasts of England, Scotland, Ireland and France. Peasants and princes in these lands spoke with fear or respect of this fierce, resistless demigod from the Far North. Finally he came to the Scilly Islands.

On the Scilly Islands lived a famous hermit who was a fortune-teller. Olaf decided to test this hermit's cleverness by sending one of his men dressed

like himself and pretending to be "Ola the Russian" to have his fortune told. "Ola the Russian" was the name by which our fair-haired hero was generally known.

When the false Ola had announced himself, the hermit said:

"You are no chieftain, but take my advice: be true to him who is your chieftain."

Olaf was indeed impressed at the aged fortune-teller's astuteness in detecting the impostor and decided to talk with the hermit, himself.

"Welcome, Chieftain," said the old man when the real Olaf presented himself. "Welcome, King."

"I am no king," answered Olaf.

"You shall be a king, my Lord," assured the hermit, "a great Christian king."

"A Christian?" exclaimed the stalwart warrior, laughing. "Why, I am the staunchest of Vikings. Odin strengthens my will and Tor guides my hand so that my blow is certain death. I have seen enough of these Christians; Bishop Poppo for example, with his hot iron and his smug priests. They baptized the Danish army but only after Kaiser Otto had subdued them with the sword."

"Odin's apostles are fierce and brave in battle," continued the fortune-teller, "but do they not scorn weakness? You, my Lord, are brave indeed, but you can also be generous and gentle to those weaker



than yourself. I tell you," he emphasized, scanning the noble figure before him, "you will be a great Christian king. It will happen in this way: When you return to your ships, you will find treachery; there will be a fight and you will receive a serious wound. You will come so near death that you will be borne to your ship on your shield. But seven nights after, you will recover. Then you will be baptized."

All this happened just as the hermit prophesied.

Olaf came back to his fleet to find that a treacherous attack had been made by some who had pledged themselves as friends. In restoring order, Olaf received a dangerous wound and had to be carried to his ship on his shield. When he had recovered—it was just seven days after—he came to the hermit and asked him where he had learned so much wisdom.

"What I am permitted to know," answered the old man, "is by the grace of the Christian God."

Then Olaf knew what he had already surmised—that the wise hermit was a believer in the new faith of Christ.

"What you have told me," said the chieftain, "impresses me a thousand times more than Poppo's hot iron. I believe you to be an honorable and a pious man but I marvel that you can possess such great knowledge of the secret things of life and

yet be so humble. Pray, teach me something of your faith."

"Willingly," replied the old man, smiling. And day after day Olaf came to the kindly hermit to sound his wisdom.

Olaf with his noble mind realized that he had met another with great intelligence who thought honestly. The young Viking, himself, never acted against the dictates of his conscience. When he went on raids, he was conforming to the only code of honor that he knew.

"To kill for the sake of killing or to plunder is one thing," explained his teacher. "To kill in defending one's land, one's religion or one's friends is another."

A new light came into the Norseman's eyes. That difference was not marked in his Viking code.

The weeks went by. Olaf came every day to the hermit. For the second time in his life, a great interest took possession of both mind and heart. There came consolation for the beloved Geyra's death. A new beacon star shone through the clouds, dispelling the gloom. The door to a new life stood open: "Welcome to the weary; hope for the hopeless" was over the portal. Perhaps it was worth trying?

Olaf's men had watched their leader with interest as he continued his daily visits with the hermit. Finally some of them sought the learned man on

their own account to hear about the new religion. The result was that before these doughty Vikings left the Scilly Islands, one and all were baptized in the faith of the Christ.

They came to England.

The peasants in the coast towns heard with distress that the fierce Ola, the Russian, had arrived; but there was no cause for fear. Olaf was now a Christian as were the people of England. The days of his Viking raids were over.

There was, however, considerable excitement in the town where the Vikings landed, for quite another reason. All the unmarried men of the district had assembled so that the witty—and wealthy—Irish Princess Gyda could choose a husband. The princess was a sister of the king of Dublin, had married an English nobleman, become a widow and now with his vast estates to manage, wished to find a helpmate.

Of all Gyda's matrimonial might-bes, the Knight Alvine was the most powerful. In fact he had not the slightest doubt about winning the lady, and proposed to her immediately after her husband's death. Gyda dropped her eyes and said she appreciated his generous offer but that she must have time to think it over. Finally she suggested the assembly. The Knight Alvine had thought it very becoming in Gyda to arrange this public way of acknowledging him as her future



husband. For she would of course select *him*. Was he not the most desirable marriageable man for miles around? So Alvine came to the meeting in his most elegant costume, ready to take over his new duties with the grace and dignity that became such a perfect knight.

But the other young men in the district were not so sure as was Alvine about the choice of the princess. It might be that one or another of them had been the object of a silent and albeit proper and judiciously hidden admiration from the noble lady. This, perhaps, was the only way she could make known the real wish of her heart. Other young dandies in far-away towns had heard of the witty—and wealthy—princess and thought they would try their luck. Thus Alvine was surprised to find a whole gathering of possibilities ready to dispute his indisputable title. But he only held his head the higher and thought:

“They are fine birds now, but wait until the Lady Gyda comes. *Then* they shall see!”

When the fair Gyda did come, she swept right by the pompous Alvine as though she didn’t see him at all.

“Such exquisite taste,” thought the latter. “She doesn’t wish to offend them by declaring herself at once.” And he stroked his mustachios and dawdled with his sword to show similar good taste.

Apart from the rest stood Olaf and his Viking

crew watching the party. To conceal his disheveled appearance (they had had a stormy passage and did not have time to change their clothes), Olaf had cast a shaggy coat over his broad shoulders.

The Lady Gyda walked through the crowd of admirers nodding to one, greeting another and smiling on a third. She was clever enough to know that it is not so easy to choose a desirable husband especially when one is witty—and wealthy. She also knew enough not to select a candidate for the fine appearance he made in his clothes.

Suddenly the princess became aware of a gaze that caused her to stop short. A pair of eyes were twinkling at her with a look quite different from the abject glances of her suitors. The owner of the eyes did not in fact seem like a suitor at all. He was roughly dressed—apparently a foreigner—and he seemed to view with a quiet amusement, the whole peacock display without being a part of it.

It was, however, Gyda's party and she had a right to know the names of the people who came. So she walked straight up to the smiling stranger.

"And who are you?" said she.

"My name is Ola," replied the Viking simply. "I am a sailor."

The princess looked up into the frank face, so

bronzed by the wind that the blond disheveled hair seemed white in comparison. She looked straight into those eyes that seemed so true and good; yet said so distinctly: "I am your master."

Without a bit of reasoning, she met this silent challenge with:

"If you will have *me*, you are my choice."

"I shall certainly not say 'no,' " smiled the owner of the blue eyes, "but may I ask my lady's name and birth?"

"I am a king's daughter from Ireland," replied the damsel. "I married the ruler of these estates, but now that he is dead I seek a helpmate to whom I can entrust my affairs. My name is Gyda."

It was many years since our hero had lost his beloved Geyra. After the restless career of an adventurer, he longed again for a home. And life had another meaning for him since he had accepted the faith of Christ;—a Viking's existence of pillage and raid was no longer possible. Perhaps, too, this slender Irish girl with her intelligence and charm recalled the star-eyed object of his first adoration. At any rate, Olaf and Gyda discussed the matter, and, as a result, were formally betrothed.

Imagine the anger of the slighted Knight Alvine when the truth dawned on him. He raged. He stormed. He frothed. He actually tore some of his beautiful clothes.



"Satisfaction!" he fumed. "I will have satisfaction!"

Now it was the English custom that, when there were two contestants for such an important thing as a lady, particularly a beautiful—and wealthy—one, there should be a trial by arms to decide the matter. The Knight Alvine was a clever swordsman and challenged Olaf to a tournament. To be sure, the lady had apparently decided the matter herself, but Alvine demanded a higher appeal over her very poor judgment. Who would have thought that Gyda, famous for her wit, could have been so stupid? Why, she knew nothing about this strange "Ola," had never seen him before!

To the distress of his newly betrothed, Olaf accepted Alvine's challenge.

"But if you challenge, I choose the weapon," said the Norseman. "We shall fight with the battle-ax."

"Let the fellow fight with his crude battle-ax," answered Alvine haughtily. "*We* shall use a gentleman's weapon—the sword."

It was no little single-handed engagement between Olaf and his English opponent. There were to be twelve men on each side chosen by the respective leaders. Each selected the eleven best fighters he could find, Olaf's men all being armed with axes and Alvine's with swords.

The tournament was on!

Alvine came at Olaf, brandishing his sword. Olaf made two quick strokes with his ax: with the first he knocked the sword from his rival's hand; with the second he knocked Alvine flat. The other eleven Vikings did practically the same to their opponents. In a short time all of Alvine's "gentlemen fighters" were kicking and scrambling on the ground, while the sturdy Vikings bound them fast. In the old days, Olaf's men would have made short work of the vanquished, but now that they were Christians, they contented themselves with a public humiliation of their foe. And humble they were indeed, when they found themselves spared further rough treatment.

The Knight Alvine was not quite clear as to just what had happened until it was over. Then he ruefully realized that the only thing for him after such a disgrace was exile. In fact the English custom demanded the exile of the unsuccessful contestant and accorded the winner not only the disputed prize but all the belongings of the vanquished! Thus Olaf became rich in a day, for the possessions of the Knight Alvine were turned over to him. But the main prize was of course the charming Gyda, and, twice won, he found her doubly charming as his bride.

Now came peaceful happy days into the life of the wanderer. The pair lived sometimes in England, sometimes in Dublin at the court of Gyda's

father. It was, indeed, much like Olaf's first great adventure when he had wed Geyra in Vendland. It was not, however, quite the same. The other had been the first. Olaf never forgot his Geyra and the wonderful days spent in her realm by the Baltic Sea.

And there was another longing in Olaf's soul. It was to return to his own people and the land of his birth, Norway. The hermit's prophecy still rang in his ears:

"You will be a great Christian king."

Of what kingdom?

Olaf's true origin was not known, but somehow throughout the Far North and in the British Isles, a rumor spread that a prince of the line sprung from the god Frey, would come out of the West to claim Norway as his own.

<sup>1</sup>Danevirke is still considered by many patriotic Danes to be the proper boundary between their land and Germany. It now lies in Germany.

<sup>2</sup>This is one of the first historical instances where the Norse nationality is threatened from the south.

<sup>3</sup>Other historians do not agree with Snorra as to some of these details but the tale as here told is based on Snorra's own.

<sup>4</sup>Blue-Tooth was Denmark's first Christian king and really became a good Christian. At Jellinge in Denmark there still stands the Christian rune-stone that Blue-Tooth erected over his father's grave.

<sup>5</sup>As you will remember from the story of *False Gods and True*.



<sup>6</sup>The raven is Odin's sacred bird.

<sup>7</sup>See the story, *The Ring in the Temple Door*.

# XIII

## THE VOWS OF THE JOM VIKINGS

<i>Earl Haakon</i> , Ruler of Norway	<i>Earl Erik</i>	} sons of Earl Haakon
	<i>Erling</i>	
<i>Sven Fork-Beard</i> , King of Denmark	<i>Sven</i>	
<i>Sigvald</i> , Earl of the Jom Vikings <sup>1</sup>	<i>The Vengeance</i> , Ingeborg's father	
<i>Vaughn</i> , the unconquerable	<i>Tyra</i> , Princess of Denmark	
<i>Bua</i> , the battle-beaten Vikings from Jomsborg	<i>Ingeborg</i> , a Norwegian beauty	
<i>Sigurd</i> , the handsome		

PLACE: Denmark and at Horunga Bay in Norway.

“**P**OUR the mead, fair sister Tyra, for our guests, the Vikings from Jom!” cried Fork-Beard, the new king of Denmark as he stood on the steps of his father’s throne.<sup>2</sup> The Princess Tyra, standing by her brother’s side, bowed her head.

“My Lord,” said she in a low voice, “spare me this humiliation. Let another pour for these Vikings from Jom.”

“Hush!” warned the new king sharply, “no one but a king’s daughter should pour the coronation drink for our distinguished guests.”

“The daughter of King Blue-Tooth is a Christian as her father was,” answered Tyra coldly.

"What would our dead father say if he saw me pouring mead for these heathen?"

The noise of the feasting quieted down. Questioning glances were cast toward the pair standing at the foot of the High Seat. Was there a hitch in the ceremonies?

"Tyra," protested Fork-Beard in a whisper, "remember our uncertain throne. What is this Christianity compared with a powerful alliance? The Jom Vikings are a host in themselves and their chief Earl Sigvald there, has just married Astrid, daughter of the king of Vendland!"

"Heathen, all of them!" was Tyra's haughty reply. "But, my Lord, for your sake I shall pour—on this condition: that after the coronation toast, you drink to the new Christ."

The queenly Tyra moved over to the seats of honor and filled the beakers of the fierce Jom chieftains: first of Earl Sigvald; then of the battle-beaten Bua; then of Vaughn, the unconquerable; finally of Sigurd, the handsome son of Bua, proud of his prowess and his wealth of tawny hair. Terrible and imposing guests they were, but the hand of Tyra never trembled.

"Skaal!"<sup>3</sup> cried Fork-Beard mounting the ancient High Seat of his fathers. And when everybody was quiet, he added:

Well, what King-Fork added, remade the map of northern Europe. According to Viking cus-



tom, a new king when drinking the coronation toast, must make a vow. The guests waited in suspense to hear what the vow would be. There had already been considerable drinking, particularly among the Jom Vikings, who had not come all the way from their castle in Vendland for nothing, and he knew it would have to be something of a vow to impress his boisterous allies.

"Friends," went on Fork-Beard, "hear my vow: Before three winters have passed I'll be king of England. I shall kill King Ethelred or drive him out!"<sup>4</sup>

That was a vow, indeed! The chieftains from Jom looked at one another, open-mouthed.

"Now for *my* toast!" spoke the eyes of the Princess Tyra as she fixed her brother with a commanding gaze. It was plain that there was more than one imperious will in the family.

"The Kristi Beaker!" shouted Fork-Beard, waving his horn. And everybody drank including the Jom Vikings, who, while not members of the new faith, were not going to let such a good chance for another drink pass them by. This doughty assembly were not used to being outdone either in drinking or vowing. Having excelled every one in the former, they were in the mood for the latter. Up rose the wily Earl Sigvald.

"Skaal!" he cried and before the company had time to get their breaths, he added: "Friends, hear

my vow: Ere three winters are ripe, I shall be king of Norway. As for Earl Haakon who rules there, I'll kill him or drive him out!"

"Hear!" cried the battle-beaten Bua, also rising and brandishing his cup like a weapon: "I vow that I will follow our valiant Earl Sigvald and never leave him until Haakon is driven out!"

"I, too!" shouted Sigurd, Bua's handsome son, tossing his tawny locks: "I vow that I will follow Sigvald and my father until the Jom Vikings conquer Norway!"

Vaughn, the unconquerable, wished to outvow even his companions from Jom.

"Down with Earl Haakon of Norway!" he bel-  
lowed. "When the Jom Vikings decree his doom, it is sealed. But, my friends, did you ever hear of Ingeborg, the toast of all Norway? I vow that I shall kill her father and carry her off. Skaal!"

Now indeed the hand of the Princess Tyra trembled; not in fear but in anger.

"So much regard have these heathen for the women," she muttered: "In Christ's name, *I* vow that I will never submit to another indignity from them!"

And with that she swept from the hall like an injured goddess.

Her absence however was not noticed, for the confusion had become indescribable. The Jom Vikings cheered, other chieftains began declaim-

ing and on every side vows were made that nobody listened to. It became a very wild coronation party and therefore a complete success, judged from the standards of that day.

Next morning, it was another matter. The Jom Vikings awoke with severe headaches and agreed among themselves that they had taken not only too much to drink, but too many vows. What was to be done about it? A vow in Viking etiquette was a serious thing. In fact if an attempt were not made to fulfill these rash promises, the warriors would lose caste and the word "Jom" would fall into discredit. So we find Earl Sigvald and his fierce companions sober but determined, assembling an expedition to conquer Norway. Stories of Fork-Beard's feast and rumors of the vows spread from land to land, until every one in the Far North had heard the news.<sup>5</sup>

Among those who heard the tidings, one of the most interested, you may imagine, was Earl Haakon, who began at once to prepare a resistance against such a terrible enemy. He was no longer so young as in the days when he had defended Norway against other intruders, but he was still the shrewd fearless leader, beloved of his people. And now he had three fine sons to help him. Especially was the eldest, Earl Erik, to prove of great assistance. (He was called "Earl" as his father's chosen heir.) Active and energetic like his father,



the young Erik was soon busy in sending out the war arrows. The darts passed from hand to hand after the century-old custom, and soon the whole country was alive with preparations to aid in repelling the adventurers from Jom.

One day Earl Haakon sat at dinner when a peasant from a newly-arrived boat forced his way into the earl's presence.

"The Jom Vikings have come!" cried the peasant.

"What proof have you?" asked Earl Haakon, rising.

The peasant held out the stump of an arm. "Is that proof enough?" he replied.

It was indeed true. The swift, cruel Jom Vikings were already in the land, spreading terror among the peaceful inhabitants. Earl Haakon boarded his ship and rowed into the different fiords, up along one side and out along the other, stopping neither day nor night until he had given the word personally to every vessel waiting there. Meanwhile his son, Earl Erik, led the army southward on forced marches to relieve the stricken districts.

Wherever they came, the Jom Vikings plundered and laid waste. They killed the men, took the women as slaves and brought the cattle and other booty on board their ships. But they could not learn where Earl Haakon himself was sta-

tioned for nobody would tell them. Finally an old farmer came to Bua, the battle-beaten, and said:

"You are no warriors, killing defenseless people and driving cows and calves along the seashore. If you were *real* fighters you would seek out the bear, especially when his cave is so near."

"What bear does this fellow mean?" asked Bua.

"I mean Earl Haakon," answered the farmer. "He rowed into that fiord yesterday. He has a ship or two—perhaps three—and doesn't know you are near."

Bua and his men at once climbed into their ships, leaving the cattle and booty they had been collecting on the strand.

"Let us follow the old fellow's hint," cried Bua, "there may be something in it. After all it is Haakon we are seeking."

The word was sent to Earl Sigvald and with all their ships united, the Jom Vikings rowed up to block the fiord and cage "the bear."

The meeting place of these rival forces has been famous ever since. It was called Horunga Bay.<sup>6</sup> And there the wily Jom Vikings found their prey—the "bear" with not three but one hundred and eighty ships! For Earl Haakon had just completed the rounding up of his fleet and had joined forces with his son Erik. It was certainly more than the Jom Vikings had bargained for. They had in all only sixty ships. On the other hand

their vessels were much larger and higher than Earl Haakon's, whose ships could be more easily boarded from above while it was a difficult thing to fight one's way up to the decks of the Jom dragons. Then, too, the forces of Earl Sigvald were a reckless crew who had come for the express purpose of conquest. Inferiority of numbers piqued their dare-deviltry; they were used to that sort of thing. And so they cleared for battle with a gusto that boded ill for the peasants of Norway.

It was indeed a sight to make the flapping sea-gulls wheel and scream and seek their nests on the most inaccessible cliff-sides. Well might the stern rocks themselves tremble, for Norway's fate hung in the balance. Was the fortress of the Norse gods, the cradle of a proud and ancient race, to fall into the hands of strangers?

Earl Haakon, clever as he had been in assembling his men, was not so sure of victory as in the old times.

"Strengthen my faith, Odin, All-Father," he prayed. "Put courage in the hearts of my sons and you, oh, Tor, teach my men to strike, for we are fighting your battle as well as our own."

"Like two rows of gigantic sea-serpents the two fleets of Viking ships lined up for the fight. All the boats on each side were bound to one another so as to present a solid front. The line on the defending side was much longer, but the terrible



Jom Viking craft rose like pre-historic sea-monsters from the waves, towering over their opponents. The backs of these reptiles swarmed with warriors and lances, battle-axes and spears glittered like so many scales.

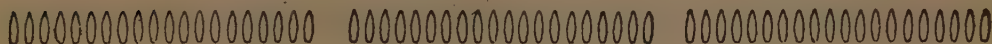
In the midst of the Jom Viking line stood the standard of the crafty Earl Sigvald. Opposite him Earl Haakon was stationed. Sigvald had twenty ships in his division while Haakon had sixty. The sturdy Bua with his handsome son Sigurd led another division of twenty ships and across from them was Haakon's son Erik with sixty vessels. Vaughn

#### THE FLEET OF JOM

Bua Sigurd

Earl Sigvald

Vaughn



Earl Erik

Earl Haakon

Sven

#### THE FLEET OF NORWAY

was in command of the remaining twenty from Jom while across from his was Haakon's second son Sven with sixty ships. Thus you may imagine them—two impressive lines—each row of dragon heads stretched forward with opened maws as if to devour the other—and now the taller row begins to move forward slowly for Earl Sigvald is attacking.

The signal is given. There is a rain of spears and javelins. And as the heavy Jom monsters crunch up against the smaller craft there is a surge of warriors over the tall sides down to the decks where Norway's yeomen are waiting them. Ah, Earl Haakon, your force is superior in numbers but never before has there been such a tax on all your strength. These are terrible men, these Jom Vikings. Pray to your Norse gods. Pray to Odin. Pray to Tor. For unless they favor your cause, you know you can not win.

Earl Haakon's division holds fast against the onslaught. The enemy can not remain on his ships even though they swarm down from above. The young Erik, too, makes a valiant stand. It is his first great trial of strength and a noble resistance he offers to the battle-beaten Bua.

But Sven, Haakon's second son! The attack of his opponent Vaughn is more awful than any onslaught he ever dreamed of. He is a brave young man, but he lacks the command over his followers that his elder brother has. His men become confused. The ships quiver as though they were about to break in pieces. In another minute the terrible Jom warriors will be in possession and slaughter all. It were best to flee while there is time.

"Hold! Sven, hold!" cries Erik, his brother, as from his side he sees in dismay that Sven is yielding. But Sven's boats continue to withdraw

while the Jom monsters crunch forward, and Vaughn's men, made super-human by their success, are about to overpower the whole division.

In another moment a new leader is standing by Sven's side. "Hold, brother, hold!" cries Erik who has personally come behind the fray from his ships and now stands to strengthen his failing brother. The men look at his bold outstanding figure, and gain courage. "For Norway—for your lives—hold the line!" shouts the brave Erik. . . . And the line wavers less. . . . Then it holds! He has performed a miracle.

But alas for Erik's own division. Bua and Sigurd, grasping the advantage of his absence, renew their attack with all the whirlwind force of a desperate crew. The Norsemen look for their leader. He has disappeared. He has fallen perhaps? Some call his name, but there is no answer. Terror seizes the hearts of the Norsemen. Now the Jom vessels are forcing themselves in between the more fragile boats under Erik's command. The bonds that hold the ships together are being cut by the enemy. The Norsemen try to interfere. Bua and Sigurd, with his tawny hair flying in the wind, lead their fellows like strange revengeful gods. Erik's ships, separated from the rest and from each other, have turned in flight!

At his post in the center, Earl Haakon sees Erik's division shattered to pieces. The whole



Norwegian line is trembling under the crushing attack; in a moment, it seems, all will be lost. Have his gods deserted him? Will the divine friends in Aasgaard see their own descendants driven from their heritage, or have the Norse folk—or he himself, perhaps—committed some sin for which the gods demand atonement? On his knees under the rain of weapons, Earl Haakon prays to his protecting deities as he never has before.

“Great Odin, mighty Tor,—desert not your people in their direst need! All I have—the best, the most precious, I promise as an offering. Haakon kneels, and in the name of his father and his father’s father who before him upheld the ancient faith, beseeches your help.”

The sky darkened. Then came a clatter that deafened the noise of the fighting. Had the gods really harkened to Haakon’s appeal? Was it Tor in his goat car or had Odin himself, with the wild Valkyries, rallied at his call?

At any rate, large stones of hail were falling, the largest the Jom Vikings had ever seen. It rattled on their shields and helmets, collected in piles on the decks and splashed menacingly around the monster ships. And the sky became darker and darker.

“The gods are with us!” cried Earl Haakon above the storm. “Give them of your best, my countrymen. Forward against Jom!”

With renewed courage, the men in Haakon's division pressed against their opponents. Terrified by this unexpected assistance from the skies, Earl Sigvald and his men had already paused. Before they could resume fighting, they were on the defensive instead of being the aggressors. The onslaught was mighty and, combined with the hail, seemed superhuman. The crafty Earl Sigvald was brave in attack, but in defeat he never wished to be among the prisoners. The tide of battle had turned; the Jom Vikings were being defeated, and unless they made haste to withdraw, they would meet a terrible fate as captives.

Earl Sigvald cut the bonds that held his ships together and fled. His other sea-monsters lurched back, turned and scurried away. Vaughn, the fearless fighter, still held his own against Sven, and saw the flight of Sigvald with dismay and wrath.

"We have not lost! We stand firm! Don't fly!" cried Vaughn.

But Earl Sigvald would not hear.

Vaughn, in his anger, sent an arrow flying after his former friend. It struck the man at the rudder, but the crafty earl only urged his rowers to pull faster. Thirty-five of the other Jom boats followed.

Erik, Haakon's son, had in the meantime returned to rally his division. He commanded several of his ships to surround the large sea-dragon

where the battle-beaten Bua stood. Bua's men were now hard-pressed.

"Up over the sides!" shouted Erik.

And his inspired warriors swarmed up over one another's shoulders to reach the decks of the taller ship. Bua's men took everything they could lay their hands on, and struck them back. But their force is too small. Their defense is weakened. And now the Norwegians have gained a foot-hold and are driving the wearied Jom crew back to the stern of their own vessel.

A rugged peasant whose home has been plundered by the raiders, stands over Bua and gives him such a slash that his nose cracks open. But Bua in turn whirls at his opponent and actually cuts him in two with the blow. It is a ghastly combat! Bua has lost and he knows, too, that it will not be pleasant for captives in that land where the Jom Vikings have made their name hated. But the booty he has taken—that, at least, the triumphant enemy shall never regain. He lifts up two chests full of loot, and cries:

"Overboard—all Bua's men!"

Then he leaps from his ship into the surf and many of his men follow his example.

Earl Erik now stood commander of the sea monster on which the sturdy Bua so proudly sailed from Denmark. But he did not remain there long for he was needed elsewhere. While other of



Bua's ships were easy prey after their leader disappeared under the waves, the men around the fierce Vaughn were still fighting like demons. Earl Erik himself was forced to admire the wild courage of "the unconquerable." But Vaughn's resistance was hopeless; Erik finally overcame him and had him fastened with ropes so that he could not move. With twenty-nine other exhausted prisoners, the warrior was carried ashore.

Meanwhile Earl Haakon found his share of danger. As he led his division forward, the maddened men from Jom surged around him, trying with all their might to drag him down. His armor finally became so torn that he had to pull off the pieces and cast them away. A court bard long after described the event:

"That coat by a noble maid was wrought—  
(Hark the clatter of swords!)  
That armor, when pierced, was good for naught;  
(Hark the clatter of swords!)  
On the sand he threw it, the ring-woven coat,  
And stood uncovered where missiles smote,  
As he cleared the foe from his dragon boat—  
(Hark the clatter of swords!)"

The defeated Jom Vikings were seated along a tree trunk awaiting their doom. That doom, they were sure, would not be long in coming; swift and terrible it would be as a thunderbolt from the war-

god Tor. Silent they sat, their weary heads erect for they still bore the name and upheld the honor of that castle of Jom' back in Vendland—even though their Earl Sigvald had fled. That they should die was a little thing compared to a flaw in the reputation of Jom. Along came a bearded Norwegian swinging an ax.

"Where is Vaughn, the unconquerable?" he cried in a terrible voice. "Where is the scoundrel that has abused my daughter's name?"

It was the father of Ingeborg, the famous beauty whom Vaughn had vowed he would carry off.

"Where is Vaughn?" repeated the swarty chieftain. "Ah-ha! Here he is, the villain! You swore at Fork-Beard's feast that you would kill me. Now we shall see which of us kills the other—Ha-ha!" And with a demon-like laugh, he swung the battle-ax.

The Jom Vikings' feet were tied together, the same rope running from prisoner to prisoner. But their hands were free.

"We will begin with the first one," laughed the warrior diabolically. "And Vaughn can count heads until his turn comes."

Then, with a swing, he severed the neck of the first in the line. Vaughn with stern features gazed into space as though nothing had happened. The bearded executioner approached the next victim;

another head rolled on the ground. Those were mighty blows from the arm of Ingeborg's wrathful father!

One of the Jom Vikings turned to his companion.

"See," he cried, "I have a brooch-pin in my hand. If I am conscious after my head is severed, I shall stick the pin into the earth."

But his head rolled off just like the others and the brooch fell from the nerveless hand. Crunch! Crash! His companion had followed him. Ingeborg's father had apparently as much strength as ever in his angry arm.

The next victim was a very handsome fellow with thick tawny curls hanging down to his shoulders. The young man was evidently proud of his hair for he combed it carefully over his head as he stretched his neck for the fatal blow.

"Don't let the blood come into my hair," he begged.

A Norwegian standing by, took the hair and held it fast. The ax fell. The prisoner gave a toss with his fair head which brought the Norwegian's hands under the weapon. The blow fell on the hands, cutting them both off while the blade clove deep into the earth.

"Stop!" cried Earl Erik who had come up. "Who is that handsome fellow?"

"My name is Sigurd," said the warrior of the



locks. "I am the son of Bua the battle-beaten." And he added haughtily, "All the Jom Vikings are not dead yet."

"That was a bold but clever trick, worthy of the son of Bua," answered the earl. "Will you have mercy, Sigurd?"

"It depends upon who offers it," replied the prisoner coldly.

"One who can grant it," said the earl. "I am Erik, Earl Haakon's son."

"Then I accept," answered the tawny-haired youth and he was loosened from the ropes.

Ingeborg's father witnessed the incident with no pleasant countenance. He had been leading up to the great event—the execution of the hated Vaughn—but now he decided to stage the final scene before there were further acts of mercy.

"However many you may pardon, Earl Erik," said he, drawing himself up like a threatening Vengeance, "*one* shall not have mercy. Let Vaughn eat his vow!"

With a stride and a swing, he made for his prey. The Jom Viking sitting beside Vaughn deliberately stumbled in the ropes and fell over the feet of Vengeance. The latter floundered and slipped; in a twinkling Vaughn leaped up, grasped the ax, wielded it with all the might of a Jom Viking—and Ingeborg's father lay beheaded among his headless victims.

After all it *was* Vaughn that killed Ingeborg's father.

Earl Erik watched this impudent performance in amazement. Captured, bound, defenseless—these fierce young warriors resisted as long as there was a breath of life in them. A true Norseman was Erik and even though his fellow-countryman had been slain, he admired the brave unconquered spirit of this enemy.

Erik approached Vaughn. Gazing into the calm fearless eyes of that sturdy warrior he saw in their depths, a noble soul.

"Vaughn, will you go in peace?" he asked.

"Only if my comrades may go with me," answered Vaughn.

There had indeed been bloodshed enough.

"Loosen the ropes!" commanded the young earl. And so twelve of these Jom Vikings found freedom after eighteen had met their fate under the ax of Vengeance.

Meanwhile Earl Haakon had been resting by another fallen tree. The ship of the battle-beaten Bua lay half drawn up on the strand near by. Suddenly the silence was broken by the twang of a bow-string. An arrow struck one of Earl Haakon's companions—a richly-clad nobleman, and he fell on the spot. The other men rushed to the stranded sea-monster where they found one lone Jom Viking propped up among the dead. His feet

were cut off and he was dying; all the strength of his last moments had been put into that shot.

"Whom did I strike?" he gasped.

"It was not Earl Haakon," they replied.

"Curse the luck!" hissed those dying lips. He had hoped that his final shot would reach Norway's ruler.

Then Earl Haakon no longer regretted the loss of his fine armor, for that coat "wrought by a noble maid" would have made him the mark for that deadly dart-arrow.

Yes, Earl Haakon with the help of his gallant son had won the fight at Horunga Bay. The power of the dreadful Jom Vikings was broken and Norway could again breathe freely. But Haakon was not happy. The pardoning of Vaughn and his companions had displeased him; that was not the true Norse Viking spirit. And another cloud hung over him:—he returned to his capital in Trondhjem without Erling, his youngest son.

What had happened to the young Erling, Haakon's pride? He had been with his father during the heat of the battle. But after Haakon had made his wild prayer to the gods, Erling had not been seen. No one dared ask, but Haakon's own men whispered that just before the hail came, just before the wild Valkyries swept through the air on rushing wings, their leader in his distress promised his best, most precious possession to the gods—and



then (it was only whispered, mind you—but it *was* whispered) he—had—offered—Erling—as—a—human—sacrifice!<sup>8</sup>

Earl Erik heard the rumor. Let the great gods be honored indeed. The earls of Trondhjem had always been their staunchest supporters. But were these gods so cruel as to demand such an innocent offering? His father had perhaps been over-zealous. Poor little Erling! Tears started to Erik's eyes as he thought of the fate of that younger brother. It could not be after all; his father would never resort to that cruel, long-abandoned custom, least of all when the victim should be Erling, the pride of their house. And yet—

While Erik remained loyal to his father, there seemed to have come a rift between father and son. They were silent in each other's presence. Neither ever mentioned Erling, but when the name of Vaughn was spoken, Haakon frowned.

But Erik was glad that he had spared the valiant Jom Viking, and the two former foes became friends. Vaughn was even entertained by Erik at his country-place.

"I can not forget my vow at Fork-Beard's feast," said the Jom Viking one day to his host. "You have heard perhaps about that."

Erik nodded. Every one in the Far North had heard.

"And now you wish to meet the lady after kill-

ing her father?" questioned the earl with a curious smile.

"Exactly so!" admitted Vaughn. "And I should like to try to win her as my wife."

It was no easy task that Vaughn wished to undertake, but Erik consented to bring the two together. Ingeborg naturally loathed the thought of meeting her father's murderer, but Vaughn found Ingeborg even more beautiful and fascinating than rumor had painted her. And Vaughn was not called "the unconquerable" because of his conquests in battle only; he knew the way to a woman's heart and the more difficult the way the greater the glory in reaching the goal.

Erik himself thought it would be impossible for his friend to win the proud Ingeborg, but the impossible happened. The lady finally found in the stalwart Jom Viking as true a lover as Erik had found a friend.

In a fine ship, the gift of Earl Erik, Vaughn sailed back to Denmark with Ingeborg as his bride.

So much for the cruise of the Jom Vikings who tried to conquer Norway. The only one of them that fulfilled his vow was Vaughn who lived long afterward in Denmark, renowned for his conquests in war and love.

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<sup>1</sup>Jom is pronounced Yum.

<sup>2</sup>This famous feast undoubtedly took place at the Danish capital Roskilde.

<sup>3</sup>*Skaal*, probably the best-known Scandinavian expression the world over means "your health." It is said to have the same origin as our word *skull*, the inference being that in very ancient times a toast was drunk from an enemy's skull. Compare also the Scotch word *skoll* meaning *bowl*.

<sup>4</sup>He kept his vow: but that is another story.

<sup>5</sup>This feast is still famous in the Far North. In Frederiksborg, Denmark's finest castle, there is an impressive frieze of wall-paintings, the first of which represents this feast. The rest of the series represents the conquests of England by the Danes—the fulfillment of King Fork-Beard's vow, and is a subject of which the Danes are naturally proud.

<sup>6</sup>Horunga Bay—in Norwegian spelled Hjaarungavaagen.

<sup>7</sup>The castle of Jom (Jomsborg) occupies a unique place in Viking history. It was built on a small island at the mouth of the River Oder. In those days this was a lively center of commerce; merchants from Venice met traders from Gardarika, and Greeks from Byzantium found Norsemen to purchase their wares. The remarkable crew of Vikings living in this castle knew no standard except that of bravery. Rank or birth did not matter, but a Jom Viking must know no fear. A description of their mode of living still exists in an ancient composition, *The Saga of the Jom Vikings*. All warriors were between the ages of eighteen and fifty. No woman could enter the castle. In the fine harbor three hundred Viking sea-monsters could ride at anchor. Remnants of Jom's mighty walls may still be seen. Rare coins and other interesting antiques have been recovered from the remains of this castle of mystery and adventure. See *History of the Norwegian People*, by Gjerset.

<sup>8</sup>How Earl Haakon sacrificed his son to appease his Norse gods has been told and retold in Scandinavian song and story. Saxo, the Danish monk, makes Haakon sacrifice two of his sons. The most poetic description of the deed is undoubtedly



Oehlenschlaeger's. This famous Danish dramatist in his tragedy entitled *Earl Haakon* stages the scene of the sacrifice in a sacred grove. Among the trees are great white images of the dreadful gods that frighten the lad Erling, although he does not know the fate that awaits him.

"Oh, father," cries the youth, "I am afraid. That horrible old man stares so evilly at me."

"What, my son? Are you afraid of Odin?" asks Earl Haakon who can not bring himself to do the deed, although he feels that the gods require it.

"Not the real Odin in Heaven," answers the boy, "but that pale, horrid troll there, seems to seek my life!"

Then Haakon makes the child place a white wreath of flowers around his hair and, kneeling, pray to Odin for his blessing. Haakon, behind, draws his dagger, but his courage fails him and the dagger falls from his hand.

"You have lost your dagger," cries the boy innocently. "When I am big, I shall have one like it and help you, my father, to win your battles."

The father is now quite unnerved, but commands the boy sternly to follow him behind Odin's image.

"Behind that horrible man?" asks the boy, trembling.

"Come!" commands the father, "see the roses growing there. Not white roses, but red, blood-red, purple roses."

"Oh, dear father, I am so frightened of the red roses," says the child, weeping. But he follows trustingly.

A moment after, there is a shriek; the awful deed is done.

## XIV

### OLAF RETURNS TO HIS OWN

<i>Olaf</i> , Prince of Dublin	<i>Loden</i>	} merchants
<i>Earl Haakon</i> , ruler of Norway	<i>Klakka</i>	
<i>Earl Erik</i> , Haakon's son	<i>Gudrun</i> , the "Sun of Lund"	
<i>Kark</i> , Haakon's slave	<i>Tora</i> , the Lady of Remol	
<i>Orm</i> , a wealthy peasant	<i>Astrid</i> , Olaf's mother	

PLACE: Trondhjem, Ireland and Esthonia.<sup>1</sup>

Gudrun, golden lady of Lund  
 Daughter of Vikings free;  
 With eyes as blue as the fiord's deep hue—  
 (Depths no man can see.)  
 Proud you are, as the Norway pine,  
 That aloof on the mountain grows;  
 Pure you are, as the mountain air—  
 And cold as the mountain snows!

SUCH, at least, was the opinion of Earl Haakon about Gudrun, the lovely wife of the peasant Orm. The earl had seen her in the market-place when she came to town to make purchases; he had seen her in the village of Lund when he rode that way in the hope of seeing her; he had even met her at the gate of her husband's farm and she had saluted him with respectful, unsmiling gravity as one should salute the great earl who ruled the land. And Earl Haakon fell madly in love with

Gudrun, although she was Orm's wife, and to make her his own became the main desire of his soul.

Tall and fair grow the women of Trondhjem; tall was Gudrun—and fairer than all the rest. She moved with the freedom of a goddess of the hunt. The deepest waters of the fiord were never so clear or blue as the true-blue eyes of Gudrun. Her fresh complexion glowed like the flushing cheek of dawn, but her beauty in its fulness, enhanced by a halo of golden hair, was more like a shimmering noontide. Therefore the people in Lund called her "the sun" and the fame of the dazzling "Sun of Lund" became known throughout Norway.

Haakon, the earl, sat in his palace at Trondhjem and longed for Gudrun, wife of Orm. Haakon's hair was gray—he was no longer young—but he was mighty; king in fact if not in name.

"Ah," thought he, "did I but dare call myself 'king' and make Gudrun mine and Norway's queen, the cup of life's happiness would be full."

Take care, Earl Haakon! Do not overfill that cup! Even Odin and Tor, your gods of strength, may not tolerate too great an abuse of strength on your part. All your sacrifices can not make you a prince of the line of Frey and only such have ever borne the title "king of all Norway."

But Earl Haakon had rightly been popular in



Norway. He had freed the land from the Witch-Queen Gunhild and ushered in a new era of prosperity; he had extended the fame of the Norsemen by his brilliant defense of the Wall of Danevirke. Finally, with the help of his son Erik, he had defeated the terrible Jom Vikings and his dashing figure was already a favorite topic for the Icelandic skalds. But—under the surface hero-glory—there was surging a deep under-current of hate and anger against the earl. His son, Erik, sensed this rising tide with dread.

“Why,” thought he, “these continued rumors about my brother Erling? Did my father really sacrifice him to the gods?<sup>2</sup> And now he goes to other extremes; this passion for fair women has run away with him. More than one of our supporters has been offended by my father’s undue admiration of a wife or daughter. Where will it stop?”

Where, indeed, would it stop? Earl Erik did not know; did not dare think; would not even speak about it to his father for there always existed a strange silence between them. But many a time the younger man reddened with shame on hearing some word or jest to the disparagement of the older. He wanted to challenge it, but could not; he wanted to take the matter up with his father, but his pride would not let him.

Even on the busy farm of Orm, the peasant,

time was found to discuss the failing of Norway's greatest man.

"Haakon, our earl, is wise and brave," said the stalwart Orm one day, "but he is not quite a king."

"A true king of the old line would never go about as he does," answered a friend. "Have you heard he has quarreled with Tora, the Lady of Remul?"

"Hush," muttered an old crone from the chimney corner. "A prince of the line of Frey may yet come."

Gudrun, the wife, said nothing, but it seemed as though for a moment a cloud had dimmed the beauty of the "Sun of Lund." She turned to the window to hide a frown. She gazed down the valley where the cherry-trees were in blossom. It was early summer but on the mountains there still lay snow, white as the cherry bloom.

"A prince of the line of Frey." How that rumor persisted! Erik heard it, too, and so often that he finally resolved to speak to his father in spite of the latter's coldness.

"Have you heard, my Lord," said he respectfully, addressing his senior, "this continued talk of a prince of the line of Frey?"

"What nonsense are you talking now?" replied Haakon sharply. "I know of no such prince—save Olaf, Trygva's son, that adventurer who, they say, lives in Dublin."

"An adventurer?" repeated Erik discreetly. "But suppose he sought an adventure in Norway to prove his lineage?"

"Perhaps Earl Erik himself would befriend the adventurer?" he questioned cynically. "As he did Vaughn, the Viking from Jom."

Erik flamed with anger at this allusion to an enemy he had gallantly pardoned.

"If you doubt my loyalty, Sire," he demanded, biting his lips, "it were best that I should go my way!"

Haakon, the earl, was white—it was the whiteness of iron heated to the smelting point. For once, his clever tongue had no ready answer. He did not really suspect his son of disloyalty, but the latter irritated him beyond all bounds. After all, the great Earl Haakon had come to trust no one but himself. His own greatness had affected him like a disease.

The younger man was the first to continue.

"My Lord," he said slowly in a restrained voice, "I shall soon be at sea. I am planning a Baltic expedition. Perhaps I may serve my country better abroad, as you did at the Danevirke."

Haakon sat musing, alone in the gathering gloom.

At the Danevirke! Those were his bravest days. But who had really thwarted that expedition and caused the Danevirke to surrender in spite of his



defense. . . . Olaf! . . . He had never really seen Olaf. And yet how strangely their fates seemed linked together. Just as his forefathers' fates had always been linked with those of the princes of Frey, generation after generation.

And if Olaf should come? Ah, better it were, forewarned, to be forearmed. Now Haakon's busy brain began to build a mazy labyrinth. Plotting and planning had long since become second nature to him. So Norway's ruler resolved to send a spy to Ireland to investigate this stranger who some said was Norway's rightful king.

"If this man really is Olaf, Trygva's son," said Haakon to the spy, "induce him, if possible, to come to Trondhjem." And he thought to himself, "Once Olaf is in my power here, there will be no more talk of the princes of Frey."

Haakon's spy was a clever merchant named Klakka, for it was quite natural that such a well-known trader should travel to Dublin on a business trip. Once in the Irish capital, he had no difficulty in meeting the much-talked-of hero, "Ola" who had married a lady of royal blood. Ola seemed glad to meet Klakka and asked him many questions about Norway.

"The Earl Haakon is practically our king," explained the trader, "but he dare not use that title for the people of Norway will tolerate no real king except a prince of the line of Frey."

A glad light shone in the eyes of Ola the adventurer.

"God must have sent you with this message," he cried. "I was born in Norway; my mother Astrid took me to Gardarika as a little child and I grew up a Russian. Since, I have wandered in many lands but my heart yearns for Norway. I am a prince of the line of Frey."

"You are Olaf, Trygva's son?" exclaimed Klakka, feigning surprise and delight. "Ah, my Lord, if you knew how the people suffer under Haakon's yoke! Then you would surely come to redeem your nation!"

"Do you think they would choose me as their ruler?"

"Only come. You need no army, no fleet. The people will flock around you, when once you are among them."

Thus it happened that Olaf arranged to return to Norway with Klakka and the faithful band of followers who had been his companions in many wanderings. They came over the sea unheralded. How great was the joy of the fair-haired adventurer, when after an absence of twenty years, he stood once again on that rock-bound shore!

Olaf's first act was to have a tent erected where mass was sung in praise of the Christ that had protected him through the years and finally brought him back to his native land.<sup>3</sup> This would indeed

have shocked the great Earl Haakon, worshiper of Odin, had he but known. But events had taken such a turn since the departure of Klakka that Haakon was too busy to care whether Olaf was singing Christian mass or not.

For the mighty earl had not been able to restrain his passion for Gudrun, the wife of Orm. Night and day he had sat in his palace thinking of her, until he finally sent messengers begging her to come to him in his loneliness.

The messengers were politely received by Orm, the peasant. Even when they delivered their strange message, he showed them only courtesy, bidding them partake of food and drink. Meanwhile he sent a servant down the dale summoning a few friends to leave their tasks and come to him at once. Before the earl's convoys had finished their meal, a number of peasants were assembled in the yard outside.

"Why have you sent for us?" "What is the reason for your haste?" they asked.

"Earl Haakon has sent to fetch Gudrun, my wife," answered Orm in a hard voice, "but she shall never go, if you will help me!"

"She must never go!" cried one.

"Earl Haakon insults his own people!" exclaimed another.

"We will stand it no longer!" added a third.

"I have your support, then?" questioned Orm.



"Yes!"

So Orm, the peasant, came to the great earl's messengers and told them Gudrun could not come.

"And would not!" added Gudrun who had been standing near, gazing down the dale toward the mountains, "unless he sends the Lady Tora to fetch me!"

This sally, referring to the earl's most recent love scandal, angered the messengers.

"You will repent that remark when we tell the earl!" cried Kark, Haakon's body-servant.

"Pray tell him!" mocked Gudrun, tossing that beautiful head; those tresses dared mock the glory of the sun itself!

It was many a day since war arrows went through that peaceful valley but now they spread broadcast over the land and as they were passed from hand to hand they bore the old message: "To arms, to arms!" But also a new one: "Down with the tyrant, Earl Haakon!" For it was the peasants themselves, not their sovereign, that started these arrows on their winged way. And it was other peasants that echoed the cry and sent the message farther on.

Who would have guessed there were so many who would pass the arrows? Who would have thought that the once popular defender of the land, now stood almost friendless? But such was the case. Haakon had drawn too heavily on the

good will of the people. Around every good woman to whom he had made improper advances, stood a crowd of relatives and friends ready to echo "Tyrant" and "Down with Earl Haakon!" Others attributed their aversion to him to the tales of his human sacrifices. Many a worshiper of Odin had come to feel that even that war-like deity did not demand the offering of a human being, slaughtered in cold blood.

Meanwhile Earl Haakon waited at an elegant manor-house in the country, where his slaves had orders to bring the lovely Gudrun. How beautiful she was; such eyes, such color, so divinely formed! And soon she would be his—the famous "Sun of Lund," outshining all sister stars with her radiant wealth of golden hair. . . . So ran the thoughts of the gray-haired earl.

Now the messengers come running up the road. But Gudrun is not with them! What does it all mean?

Ah, Haakon, it means perhaps, that you have provoked the gods themselves with your insolence. The tiny war arrows have traveled even swifter than your slaves who already sense the trouble brooding in the air.

"The whole country is rising against you, my Lord!" cries Kark.

Earl Haakon can hardly believe it, but other excited slaves confirm the news. The earl has

barely time to leave the house before a mob is collected around it. He makes his way with a small armed escort to a deep valley, which has borne the name "Earls-dale" ever since.

When the peasants found that Earl Haakon had left the manor-house, they set spies at the cross-roads to hinder him from reaching the fiord where he could join his ships. This was also his plan, and sending his men away after one night spent in the valley, he decided to seek refuge with his one slave Kark at a place where he knew no harm could come to him. This was at the home of his former sweetheart, the Lady Tora of Remul. From there he hoped to come down to his fleet later on.

But if it was not easy to reach his ships, so was it also a difficult matter to come to Remul. The peasant army was evidently growing. Spies were everywhere. Haakon had several narrow escapes.

"Odin curse the rascals!" he muttered. "With the help of the gods, I shall soon punish the faithless crew."

They came to a river, partly frozen over, and the earl rode out on the ice. But the ice was thinner toward the middle and he was obliged to dismount. The horse stumbled a few paces farther. Crack, went the ice and the animal was struggling in the icy current. The gods were treating their worshiper rather shabbily, but there was no time to think of appeasing them with sacrifices.



Casting his cloak by the hole, the earl called to Kark to follow him.

"Let them fish a while for their beloved earl!" Haakon cried. "Meanwhile we shall come to Remul."

But Remul and the Lady Tora seemed still farther away to an outlaw on foot than they had seemed to a nobleman on horseback. That night Haakon and his slave slept in a miserable cave; at least they tried to sleep.

"Oh!" cried the slave, starting suddenly from a doze.

"Who is that?" asked Haakon sharply.

"I had such a horrible dream," answered his minion, shivering. "An ugly black man came to me and told me some one was dead."

"Your dream means bad luck for my ships," answered the earl tersely. He had long made a study of the dream runes and knew how to interpret the apparitions sent from Aasgaard.

Again they dozed.

"Ugh! Ugh!" shrieked Kark in a piercing voice.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Haakon irritably.

"The black man came again. He said, 'Tell the earl all ways are closed!'"

The earl said nothing but he thought, "Death! Death!" He shook himself, then wrapped his cloak more closely round him. In the dark the

slave could not see how deadly pale his master had become.

Finally the morning came, creeping timidly into the dank cave. Relieved, they arose at once, and bedraggled and weary continued their journey.

That night the Lady Tora at Remul saw a pale, disheveled figure standing before her. She could hardly believe her eyes. Was it really Earl Haakon! If so, why had he come? They had last parted in a quarrel.

"Why do you come here?" she asked coldly. "Why are you not with Gudrun, the Sun of Lund, and the newest sweetheart of Earl Haakon?"

"Tora," answered the earl faintly, "I come because you are my only friend."

"I suppose you mean," replied the lady, "that Tora is good enough, when Gudrun fails."

"I mean," replied her former lover, "that unless Tora hides me, my enemies will kill me."

"Your enemies?" questioned Tora. "So you have met Prince Olaf and he no doubt has defeated you. Is it therefore you come to the despised Tora?"

Haakon stared at her in astonishment.

"Prince Olaf?" he exclaimed. "Do you mean Olaf of the line of Frey, whom they say is in Ireland? How should I meet him, indeed!"

The Lady Tora laughed hysterically.

"Always trying to deceive me—even as in the old days. Perhaps you think that we at Remul have not heard the news, how Olaf has taken possession of all the ships belonging to the mighty Haakon!"

The earl swayed as in a trance. It was plain indeed that this *was* news. As she steadied him and led him to a chair, the lady told how Olaf had come in secret to Norway, how the secret had leaked out, how throngs of peasants had rallied around him proclaiming him their ruler, how the fleet itself had given over to him.

"But my sons,—my gallant Erik?" gasped the earl.

"They say Earl Erik has sailed for the Baltic," answered Tora.

Haakon suffered a twinge of remorse. He thought of that brave son glowing with the ardor and confidence of youth. He might have averted this calamity, if he had not been so coldly repulsed by his father!

But it was all too true. Olaf had landed just at the time when the people had turned against their earl; Klakka's lies had become truths; things were even worse than the clever spy had painted them.

Haakon's wan face stirred the pity of the gentle lady who had once loved him above all.<sup>4</sup>

"I will hide you," said she, "but—but our names



have so often been mentioned together, that I fear they will come here to look for you. No—it will not be safe for you in the house. . . . Let me see. . . . Ah, there is one place where they will never find you. Only follow me!”

So the Lady Tora led Earl Haakon and his slave Kark out of the house, through her gardens, past the houses of some retainers and along a little path. Finally they came to a great stone. Under the stone was a pig-sty.

“Here I shall hide you,” cried Tora. “No one will ever think of looking for Earl Haakon in such a place!”

It was certainly not the place where one would expect to find a great earl.

“In a matter of life and death, one must yield to circumstances,” said the nobleman, and after Kark had made the hole larger with a shovel, they both crept into the shelter. Tora then brought branches and strewed them over the opening and on top of these placed earth and gravel. As a final touch she drove the pigs over the newly-made floor and the earl and Kark retreated farther back under the stone where there was a small cave. Thus Tora left her lover—and she never saw him again.

Meanwhile the frank adventurer Olaf, from over the sea, had won all hearts. It had happened to him just as to others of the line of Frey before him: the people recognized him as their born

leader and flocked eagerly to his standard. Here right, for once, was might; the tyrant should be punished and his sons outlawed!

But where was this tyrant—the once-mighty Haakon? He was not with the ships when they welcomed their new ruler. He was not at his palace. Certainly he was not with Gudrun, the golden lady of Lund, however he might like to have been. Then some one thought of Tora, and thus Olaf, led by Orm and other peasants, came to call on the lady of Remul.

They found the gentle Tora sad and silent, but she opened her house for them, and they searched it in vain. Then Olaf led his men into the garden and mounted a large stone from which he addressed them.

In a few words he promised a reward to him who should deliver Earl Haakon to the men he had wronged.

Behind the filth of the pig-sty sat Haakon with his slave and heard the speech Olaf was making, just over them.

"What makes you so pale, Kark?" asked the earl. "And now you are as black as the earth. Do you mean to betray me?"

"No, no!" cried Kark protestingly.

"We two were born the same night: there will not be long between our deaths," warned the earl sternly.

Olaf had now finished addressing his men, and as they could find no trace of Earl Haakon they went away. But how far away, Earl Haakon could not tell, and as Tora did not return, he knew that danger was not past and they must wait in the cave.

Another night came, a dreadful night. It was stifling in the place. Haakon could not sleep, but Kark slept and by the dim light of a sputtering candle, the earl saw that his slave did not rest well. He felt overcome by a mighty disgust for this stupid churl and finally shook him so that he awoke.

"You have been dreaming. What was it about?" demanded Haakon.

"Ah, I came to Trondhjem and Prince Olaf put a gold chain around my neck."

"There will be a ring of blood around your neck, if you seek him," replied Earl Haakon. "Take care! You shall still prosper as long as I am your master, so do not betray me."

Kark was now fully awake and dared not sleep again for fear of Haakon; but the earl himself distrusted his slave more than ever. So they sat, each watching the other, like a pair of wolves. And the dreadful night wore slowly by.

Dawn came with her blessings of light and renewed strength, and peeped into the squalid hole where the two wretches sat. The longed-for light



—what a relief! The tension on Haakon's overworked brain was lessened and for a moment he dozed. Then it was as though his overwrought nerves were suddenly without a master. He writhed and squirmed on the floor; drew up his heels and bent his head as though suffering from cramp; then tried to stumble to his feet, in the meantime giving a loud and terrible scream.

Kark jumped up, frightened out of his wits. His master was attacking him. Out came a great knife from the slave's belt—and in a moment it was buried in the earl's throat.

Thus died Haakon the mighty Earl of Trondhjem and defender of Norway. The hand of a faithless slave has done the deed and all the prayers of a gentle Tora will not help him now. An ignominious death it was—no warrior's glorious end. But will Odin deny his zealous follower at Valhalla's threshold?<sup>5</sup> To him at least, has he been true.

The following day a crooked figure—like some ghastly gnome—comes to Olaf's tent with a bag on his back. It is Kark and he has come to claim a reward, for in the bag is the head of Earl Haakon.

Olaf is shocked at the bloody offering and even more so when he learns the story of the treacherous slave. So Kark does not get his gold chain, but the bloody ring around his neck, as Earl Haakon

prophesied. He is executed by Olaf's orders.

Great was the joy of all Norway over the return of a prince of the line of Frey. Province followed province in electing him king and sending him proofs of allegiance. Olaf's joy was also great, but it was tinged with sorrow. As he sat in the palace of Trondhjem, the people's choice, his thoughts went back over his varied career to that far time when he was a fugitive from his own dear land. His very first memories were of the kind and gentle hands of his mother, Astrid, who had brought him safe through many troubles to far-away Esthonia. When they were captured by pirates, she was taken from him and he never saw or heard of her again. It had been her peril that had brought Olaf his safety; her life that had been sacrificed for his. She had no doubt perished long, long ago in the land of the pirates, while he had survived to find honor in returning to his and her land. Olaf conceived a longing to see the old home where Astrid had lived. Soon after an opportunity came, Olaf made the journey to Viken where his parents had formerly lived and there he was advised to seek out a merchant named Loden.

Loden had, one summer, been on a trading trip to Esthonia. Among a crowd of slaves standing in an Esthonian market-place he had noticed a woman that looked like one of his own race. She was

pale and worn and dressed in rags but he thought he recognized her.

"What is your name?" asked Loden, of the woman.

"Ah," she sighed, "it is hard to tell. I have no name, I am a slave." But she spoke in his own tongue.

"Tell me," continued Loden, eagerly. "It can not be that you are Astrid, wife of Trygva who was once our governor in Viken?"

The woman began to weep. "I hardly know. . . . Perhaps I once was. . . . Ah, Sire, if you would do a good deed, buy this poor slave and take her to Norway, her native land!"

Loden was proud to be able to redeem this noble lady—for she was Astrid—whose disappearance so many years before had been the talk of Viken and to bring her back to her home.

Thus it happened that when the young King Olaf sought Loden, the merchant, he found his mother. Yes, it was the same Lady Astrid of by-gone years, still a handsome woman although her gray hair told of years of doubt and suffering.

"My boy, my Olaf!" cried Astrid, as he took her in his arms. "How I have longed for you through the years. If only your father might have seen his son—*Norway's king!* But," she added aglow with the joyful experience, "I must present you to your new father—Loden, my deliverer."



For Astrid had wed the kind merchant who rescued her from bondage.

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<sup>1</sup>Both Ireland and Esthonia, which later was so long a part of Russia, were in those days colonized by the Vikings. In Ireland the Vikings rebuilt many old ruined cities. Under Viking influence Dublin developed into one of the leading trade centers of Northern Europe. The peninsula of Esthonia was a part of Denmark as late as 1349. It was here that the Danish flag, "Danebrog"—"the only flag with a name" was supposed by a miracle to have fallen from heaven.

<sup>2</sup>See preceding story, *The Vows of the Jom Vikings*.

<sup>3</sup>Compare this return of a Christian "Son of Frey" to his heathen Norway with a similar instance related in the story, *Erik Blood-Ax and Haakon the Good*.

<sup>4</sup>In the Danish play, *Haakon Jarl*, the great dramatist, Oehlenschlaeger, pictures this meeting between Haakon and Tora as a vivid and most romantic love-scene. In the dead of night Haakon, disguised, slips into the Lady Tora's chamber. When assured that they are alone, he throws back his mantle.

"Is it indeed Haakon?" exclaims Tora. "This white, silent shape standing in Tora's room so far from the lights of the gay palace?"

"The pale shadow you see," answers the earl, "was once the mighty ruler of Norway. But he fell in the strife and was forgotten. Now it is only his ghost that walks—frightening folk by night."

"Oh," cries Tora, "I am indeed revenged—revenged! But now my anger is gone and the old passion, love, has returned. Oh, I were indeed a were-wolf and no woman, if your plight did not move me. Come to my heart!"

Haakon sinks into her arms and weeps.

"You weep, Haakon?" asks the lady. "Great gods of Valhalla—when have I ever seen a tear upon that cheek before?"

"Have you not seen stones weep when brought to the warmth from the cold?" he replies wildly. "The mountain snow melts, winter flows away in tears—yielding before the spring where flowers bloom for Olaf, Trygva's son. But Earl Haakon is not here—it is his ghost that walks!"

"Come, come, my Haakon," sympathizes his sweetheart. "Do not talk so wildly. Your great heart has now known too much suffering. Let me hide you until the danger is past and then a better fortune will surely smile on us both."

<sup>5</sup>The death of Earl Haakon is one of the best-told stories in all the ancient sagas of Iceland. Of Earl Haakon, the English writer, Lord Dufferin, says in *Letters from High Latitudes*, 1856, "He is certainly one of the most picturesque figures of these Norwegian dramas; what with his rude wit, his personal bravery, and that hereditary beauty of his race for which he was conspicuous above the rest. His very errors, great as they were, have a dash and prestige about them, which in that rude time must have dazzled men's eyes, and especially *women's*, as his story proves."

## XV

### THE RING IN THE TEMPLE DOOR

<i>Olaf</i> , King of Norway	<i>The Bishop of Norway</i>
<i>Iron-Beard</i> , Worshiper of	<i>The Spirit of the Ring</i>
Odin	<i>Sigrid the Haughty</i> , Queen-
<i>Eyvind</i> , a magician	Mother of Sweden
<i>Harald Grenska</i> , Olaf's cousin	<i>Gudrun</i> , Iron-Beard's daugh-
<i>Leif the Lucky</i> , Olaf's mes-	ter
senger	<i>Astrid</i> , Olaf's mother

PLACE: Norway, especially in Trondhjem, and Sweden.

#### THE CHALLENGE TO TOR<sup>1</sup>

ON the door of Odin's temple glistened a wonderful ring. There was not another such ring in the Far North. So bright and beautiful it was, that people brought their children to Trondhjem from a hundred miles away just to see it. The ring was the gift of the mighty Earl Haakon to the greatest of the Norse gods.<sup>2</sup> It shone with a molten magic light. It was fashioned in gold.

But Odin's mighty image sitting within knew that his throne was less secure than in the days of Earl Haakon. Tor, also, in his temple near by felt less sure of his old-time strength. Yes, the dumb idols realized even more than the priests that sprinkled their altars with blood that Ragnarok—"the twilight of the gods"—was impending;



their days were numbered. King Olaf, disciple of the new Christ, had willed it so.

Olaf's mother, Astrid, assembled the greatest people of Viken at her home, and the young king told them of the new religion.

"The days of human sacrifices and Viking raids are past," said Olaf to the chieftains. "The greatest blessing for Norway is peace and that can never be had from Odin and Tor who are war gods. I shall bring Norway to the real Prince of Peace or die trying."

Under Olaf's influence the whole province of Viken gave up the old gods. His eager words seemed to work miracles; the multitudes came and were baptized. Olaf then went into the provinces near by, and everywhere this fair young giant, aglow with his mission, won followers. His manner was frank and winning, and he invited the peasants to discuss the matter with him.

In one district, the farmers chose their three cleverest men to argue the cause of their Norse deities. The countryside assembled at the open-air meeting place; King Olaf stated the matter in simple but forceful phrases—the wise men arose to speak. But the first who stood began to cough; finally he was unable to say a word. The second started to speak, but suddenly began to stammer so that the people laughed. The third then opened his mouth, but the sound that came forth was so

harsh that no one knew what he was trying to say. This exhibition was regarded as nothing short of a miracle and the peasants agreed to accept the Christian baptism. As success breeds success, so Olaf went from one triumph to another. At last, all Norway was Christian,—except Trondhjem, the fortress of the old gods.

All save Trondhjem had bent to the eager young king but Trondhjem had once before stood a similar test and still believed that the only true gods were Odin, Tor and the other Norse divinities.<sup>3</sup>

This province has indeed been first to proclaim its loyalty to Olaf, but by taking him as king the people had not agreed to take his faith. Could Olaf persuade them?

The men of Trondhjem came full-armed to Olaf's meeting. Olaf's followers also came full-armed. It was plain that both sides were prepared to meet *all* arguments! After the king had made his plea, the people's chosen speaker, Iron-Beard, arose and he neither coughed, nor stammered, nor was he hoarse.

"No ruler of ours shall break our laws, even though he be ruler," declared the rugged pagan Iron-Beard. "Even though Earl Haakon worshiped as we do, he broke our laws and we deposed him, choosing you in his stead. But you must also obey our laws as your forefathers did. Therefore

we demand of you, oh, King, that you sacrifice to their and our gods."

This speech fairly bristled with meaning. It was straight from the shoulder, and Olaf grasped the situation at once as he gazed over the assembly that also bristled—with arms and armor. The old question again: "Which were the false gods; which the true?" The final argument of the men of Trondhjem was—Force. It was plain that Olaf's only successful argument in this case must be—Force.

"I shall be glad to see the rites in your temple," said the king.

And the people, pleased at this apparent first submission to their demands, open a way for him to pass with his followers.

The king goes into the temple. Behind him throng his supporters—so many of them, in fact, that there is hardly room left for the people of Trondhjem. But their chieftains are present and the priests are already dipping their hands in the bloody bowls. Blood shall be sprinkled on the faithful; blood shall bathe the feet of the mighty Tor. For the terrible Thunder God glories in blood and bloodshed.

The king has a fixed, determined look in his blue eye. Those that have seen that look before, tremble; for it springs from faith in the heart—a faith that can move mountains, even the age-old moun-



tains of Norway. With heavy tread, Olaf advances to Tor's image.

"Your ax against mine, Tor!" The clear tones of his young voice echo in the most sacred of the holy recesses. "I challenge!"

Does not a thunderbolt crash through the roof blasting this bold mortal with fire? Does not heaven itself open to let some winged curse from Aasgaard settle on this infamous mortal's head? No.

The only lightning is the gleam of Olaf's gold-shafted ax as he strikes the great image, and the only thunder is the rumbling of the colossus as it first sways, then topples and finally crashes mightily to the floor. Perhaps Tor intends to crush Olaf the offender in that fall, but Olaf is nimble as well as strong and leaps deftly to one side. Now the king's eager followers are following his example. Other stolid images are challenging the might of Christ with *their* might, and god after god is pulled from its pedestal and mutilated with knives and axes. The confusion is terrific. The priests drop their bowls in amazement. Everything is covered with holy blood, just as if those dreadful images were bleeding from their wounds.

The stern Iron-Beard who remained at the door to keep an eye on events both within and without, hears the confusion and attempts to enter the temple. An armed guard of Olaf's men block the way.

"Let me pass!" demands the rugged pagan fiercely.

He tries to force his way; a blade of steel pierces his body and Iron-Beard, the stern apostle of a stern faith, breathes his last along with that dying religion. For that religion is now dead in Trondhjem. Tor did not meet the challenge of the Christian King Olaf. He, the supposed god of strength, has proved pitifully weak. Perhaps he is old, worn out; at any rate the fierce people of Trondhjem appreciate the vigor of Olaf's argument and method. He comes from the temple, a victor.

The people of Trondhjem have lost faith in their old gods; hypnotized by the shining personality of their new ruler. He himself, the direct descendant of Frey, is the most eager defender of the new Christ. He calls his bishop: the chiefs and yeomen of Trondhjem remove their helmets of war and receive the baptism of the Prince of Peace.<sup>4</sup>

#### THE SEARCH FOR THE RING

"What has happened to Odin's ring?" children asked of their parents. But the parents could only shake their heads.

The wonderful ring from the door of Odin's temple had disappeared. The temple, to be sure, had been destroyed along with the temple of Tor, according to Olaf's orders, but the sacred treas-

ures were kept for charity and other good uses. The ring only was missing.

Meanwhile Olaf had turned the thoughts of the people to the building of other things than temples. Fine structures were rising along the River Nid. Olaf was building a capital worthy of the haughty race of Trondhjem, a city that was to be the leading port of commerce in the Far North.

"But the ring, it never could have been destroyed!" declared the maiden Gudrun, daughter of the pagan Iron-Beard.

"Odin's ring shall be found; it must be found. The strength of Odin's power over the people lies in that ring!" answered Eyvind, the magician.

"Don't you think King Olaf has stolen it?" asked the maiden bitterly. "Being a murderer, he is no doubt a robber as well."

"Odin will hold the robber to account!" said the magician without directly answering her question.

The murder of Iron-Beard, however, had not been the fault of Olaf, who regretted that it had happened. He therefore called a meeting of Iron-Beard's relatives and expressed this regret. He knew that such an incident might well be considered ground for a feud, and he wished if possible to appease these people by some act of good will. The relatives discussed the matter and finally agreed on a strange thing: If Olaf would marry



Gudrun, the daughter of Iron-Beard and make her queen of Norway, the matter would be settled.

A pretty settlement indeed! All well enough for the ambitious relatives who saw their family made royal, but what about Gudrun?<sup>5</sup>

Over the wild cliffs and down a lonely gorge hastened Gudrun, daughter of Iron-Beard, to consult with Eyvind, the magician. She found him in his secret retreat where, in the name of the deposed gods, he practised his black arts.

"My relatives have agreed that if King Olaf weds me, my father's death will be atoned," exclaimed the maiden. "What shall I do?"

It was a long consultation, that—between maid and magician—but toward evening Gudrun wended her way homeward with something hidden in her bosom. She would agree to marry the great king, whom she considered her father's murderer.

Olaf was also perplexed at the decision of the relatives and talked it over with the bishop. He had already been twice married;<sup>6</sup> he did not love Gudrun, but he had given his word to stand by the settlement if possible. Yes, it seemed better after all to sacrifice his personal feelings for the good of his people.

So the wedding of King Olaf and Gudrun took place.

On the bridal night when King Olaf slept, Gudrun, daughter of Iron-Beard, seemed to see

phantoms from another world. First came her father, pale and bloody.

"Murderer!" muttered the shape pointing to her husband.

Then it seemed as though Gudrun saw a great, golden ring—the ring from Odin's temple door. And an old one-eyed man, the spirit of the ring, called "Thief!" as he pointed to the sleeping figure of the king.

In the dead of night, the young king awoke. Gudrun was standing close by his side.

What was that? A dagger's glint cut the darkness. Gudrun had struck, but Olaf warded off the blow and tore the poisoned weapon from her hand, as the woman swooned by the couch.'

The following morning the daughter of Iron-Beard left the palace, Olaf having returned the dowry she had brought with her. Even her ambitious relatives could not ask more, and the marriage was annulled.

Eyvind, the magician, could not conceal his wrath when he learned that Gudrun had neither killed King Olaf nor found the ring.

"The ring shall be found, it *must* be found," he muttered. "With Odin's help, I myself shall find it and confound this blasphemer of the gods."

Now there were still a few others that practised the black arts in Odin's name and they agreed to help Eyvind with his plan. It was the day be-

fore Easter. Olaf had sailed over to a small island to spend the holy day with friends. Toward evening, Eyvind, the magician, also embarked for the island, taking with him all the sorcerers, enchanters and witch-people from that part of Norway.

When they came near the island's shore they began their weird rites. Out of the water, slowly, silently, rose a heavy cloud like a curtain. When they landed, the magicians were so hidden by the mist that no one noticed them. Stealthily they moved toward the manor-house, invoking Odin, Tor and all the demons of land and water.

The day dawned—Easter day. Like a champion of Light and Right, it seemed as though the Christian God came on the sunbeams. The rays pierced the dark cloud and fell on the king and his men. The mist now settled around the magicians confusing them completely and they wandered hither and thither, helpless, while all others could see them distinctly.

The wizards were easily captured, and brought to the manor-house, where Olaf pronounced their doom—a fate so terrible that all magicians and worshipers of Odin in the Far North, when they heard of it, would tremble. There was a reef near the island which rose barren at low tide but at high tide lay several feet under water. The witch-people were bound to this reef. As the tide came in, they sank into the water. Finally only



their heads were free, then the waves came to their mouths, then to their noses—lapping, lapping, inch by inch. The water always makes a great noise here, echoing in the hollow caves of rock, but the shrieks of the magicians rose above the moaning of the tide. The place has been called the “Magicians’ Reef” ever since.

But the strangest attempt to find the ring was still to come. One evening an old man with one eye hidden under a strange hat sat among the retainers in the king’s hall. Olaf noticed the odd creature and asked him how he happened to be there. The old man replied that he was a traveler whom some of the servants had kindly invited in. Olaf asked him questions about his journeyings and he proved indeed to be widely traveled. He could even tell tales about the lands far to the east, from where the first Norsemen had come.

“Where did you hear these interesting things?” asked Olaf.

“Ah, I am very old,” sighed the guest, “and have traveled far.”

The bishop who stood near was none too pleased with the tales of the mysterious stranger. They smacked somehow of paganism.

“Is it not time for the king to sleep?” he suggested.

“I must have one more story!” cried the king, enthusiastic about this new entertainment.

And so the stranger continued with his tales.

Finally the bishop sent for the servant whose duty it was to help the king undress. The king withdrew to his sleeping chamber but insisted that the stranger should accompany him. Even after the king had retired, he allowed the little one-eyed man to sit at the foot of his couch and continue his stories.

"I have also traveled far," said Olaf finally. "But you, my friend, have seen more wonderful things than I."

"One thing you have seen that I have not," answered the little fellow, cocking his one eye quizzically, "is something that Your Majesty can perhaps show me."

"What can that be?" queried the king.

"The ring from the temple door!" whispered the old man.

"Is it not time for the king to sleep?" came the sharp voice of the bishop from without.

Olaf started. It was indeed late and he suddenly felt that he had talked long enough with the stranger.

"I can not talk longer with you now," said the king; "and must bid you good night."

The aged stranger slipped shadow-like from the room. The king slept. But later he woke in a strange anxiety, and called loudly after the departed guest.

He was nowhere to be found.

The next morning the cook came to Olaf and said:

"At an early hour a strange little man came here with two nice cattle ribs as a present for the king. Shall I prepare them for Your Majesty's dinner?"

"Never!" interposed the bishop positively. "It is some trick of that pagan dwarf."

And the king and bishop were agreed that it was no other than the Spirit of Odin's Ring who came to seek the treasure and to poison the champion of the new faith.<sup>8</sup>

Norway was now Christian; the believers in the old gods were silenced; but the eager king was not content. He wanted the new religion brought to the entire Far North, wherever the faith of Odin flourished. With this in view, he sent missionaries to Iceland and Greenland.

Leif was the name of Olaf's messenger to Greenland. He had many exciting adventures. First he rescued a shipwrecked crew floating far out to sea; then instead of Greenland he found a new country to the south which he called "Vinland the Good."<sup>9</sup> At last, however, he came to his destination and after that, was called Leif the Lucky. Leif's father, whose name was Erik the Red, said that Leif had evened up his luck by the bad luck he brought to Greenland—meaning the priest.



Erik the Red would hear nothing about Olaf's faith and insisted on worshiping an old polar bear.

Another land to be won lay just over the mountains from Norway. This was Sweden. But Sweden had been a stronghold of Odin and his fellow-gods even before Norway—long before, when the first mighty temple at Upsala had been raised and Frey had ruled the land.<sup>10</sup> Now the most important personage in Sweden was Queen Sigrid the Haughty.

"I shall make Sweden a Christian land," vowed King Olaf to his bishop, "if it takes the ring from Odin's temple door!"

Olaf had, in fact, been keeping the ring for just such a purpose, and he now decided to send it to Sigrid, the haughtiest supporter of the old religion, with an offer of marriage.

#### SIGRID THE HAUGHTY

When Sigrid was a little girl, a number of high-born people fled to Sweden from Norway because they feared the wicked Witch-Queen Gunhild. Among these was a prince of the line of Frey, named Harald Grenska. Sigrid's father who was a great general, befriended the exiled prince and the two children, Sigrid and Harald, grew up as brother and sister.

When Harald Grenska became eighteen, he returned to his estates in Norway. It was many

years before he saw Sigrid again, but one day he returned to Sweden on a visit and sought out his former playmate. Since his departure, Sigrid had also had many adventures. She had been courted by the king of Sweden himself, had become his wife and later, his widow. Her son was now king and she herself a woman of wealth and power.

"See!" cried Sigrid, laughing in her old vivacious manner, "all this land is mine; quite as much I'll venture to say, as you own in Norway." This was quite true; Grenska's estate was nothing in comparison.

Sigrid seemed indeed glad to greet the friend of her girlhood who had been like a brother to her. The best in the house was none too good for him; he was pressed to make a lengthy visit, rare wines were opened in his honor and his rooms were hung with costly tapestries.

Sigrid had been a tall, auburn-haired beauty with a royal bearing. She was still handsome. The lines on her clean-chiseled face were perhaps hard, but when her glance lightened with the sparkle of her intelligence, she was fascinating, irresistible. To be sure, she was capricious, and with years it seemed that her displays of temper were more frequent. But they only made her softer moods more charming, in Harald Grenska's opinion. And so—he fell desperately in love with her.

This was a pity, for Grenska was married, and to a model wife. But, be it said to his credit, he concealed his feelings from Sigrid and they parted, she the smiling, light-hearted hostess; he the depressed, heavy-hearted guest. But she had given him much to think about!

Next year, Harald Grenska returned to Sweden with a proposal of marriage for Sigrid.

"What do you mean?" asked Sigrid, this time cold and distant in her mood. "You have a good wife already."

"It means I am madly in love with you. You have bewitched me. I know my wife is a good woman, but now I can love no other but you and I am willing to divorce Aasta, if you will marry me."

"Be sure that the good fortune of you both lies in her hands," replied Sigrid shortly, and she ordered her cavalcade to move on.

But Grenska would not interpret this answer as "no" and following her to urge his suit, they finally came to Sigrid's mansion. Sigrid disappeared within and shortly afterward a servant came saying that he would show Grenska where he could spend the night, as it was now late.

This time he was led to no ancient baronial hall fitted with luxurious tapestries but to a large wooden building that was more like a barn. His companions did not think this reception boded



well and wanted their leader to proceed at once, but Grenska's mind was set. Another nobleman was also quartered there, and, strange to say, they discovered that he also had come to seek the hand of the fascinating Sigrid.

The lorn lovers pooled their woes, when more servants appeared with substantial dishes of food. The hungry travelers ate eagerly. Strong drinks were served and as soon as the beakers were emptied, they were filled again. As a lavish hostess Sigrid had not failed after all.

Wearied by their journeys and heavy from the strong drink Grenska, the nobleman from Gardarika and all their followers slept in their places. The wines had been drugged. A band of slaves had meanwhile stealthily approached. The place was surrounded by armed men from Sigrid's guard. The slaves set torches to the wooden shack and in no time it was a mass of flame. Grenska, the nobleman from Gardarika and all their retinue perished in the fire.

It was a Viking trick from the cruel, old, pagan times.<sup>11</sup>

"We shall teach little princes to court a great queen," laughed Sigrid.

And after that, she went by the name of Sigrid the Haughty.

Olaf, King of Norway, was a younger cousin of Harald Grenska. He had heard of Sigrid's terri-

ble deed long before, and it had shocked and disgusted him. But that was many years before; *now* his one idea was to bring Sweden to the true faith. He knew the far-reaching influence of that terrible pagan queen.

"If I can but master her," thought he, "she will be the best apostle in the world. The very qualities that make her cruel in the old faith might make her a mighty champion for the new."

There was a stir in the mansion of Sigrid the Haughty when Olaf's embassy arrived with an offer of marriage from Norway's Christian king. This was indeed no little prince. The name of that brilliant, handsome young ruler was a household word throughout the Far North. A thousand tales were told of his adventures, his daring, his chivalry, his conquests.

The vain queen of the auburn hair and the red temper smiled in self-satisfaction when she viewed Olaf's present—the ring from Odin's temple door.

The famous ring from the Trondhjem temple had come to Sweden! The queen-mother was at once besieged by a throng of visitors who wanted to see the treasure. Erik, the exiled Earl of Norway came, for it was Erik's father, Haakon, who had first consecrated the ring. Fork-Beard, King of Denmark, came with his ally, Earl Sigvald, the crafty Jom Viking. They were at the time paying

their respects at the Swedish court. And many others.

Among the tradesmen that begged to see the ring came two smiths. As they were examining the gift, the queen's eagle eye sought them out from the far end of the room. She swept across the floor and suddenly stood beside them.

"What are you sneering at?" she asked abruptly.

The poor smiths were much frightened.

"Indeed we were not sneering," they protested.

"Yes, you were!" asserted the red-tempered queen. "If there is anything wrong with the ring, I want to know it."

"We only think, Your Majesty, that it does not weigh quite what it should," murmured the smiths.

"Either *you* are making a jest of me, or King Olaf is," cried the angry queen. "We shall soon see which!"

The ring was ordered broken open.

What a discovery!

It was not gold after all—it was copper inside!

"So!" exclaimed Sigrid in her wrath. "He who cheats in one thing, may cheat in another. Great princes as well as small should take care when courting Sigrid the Haughty!"

Olaf came east to the boundary between Norway and Sweden to meet Sigrid, after agreement. Cold and stately, she listened to his proposal. He



begged her hand in marriage. But in this marriage, she must give up her faith and accept his.

A sarcastic smile wreathed the lips of the vain queen. "Whatever agreement we reach," she said, "you may be sure that if *you* believe what *you* like, *I* shall believe what *I* like!"

The young king gazed intently at this older woman he had thought of marrying for the good of his cause. He felt in an instant that the idea was hopeless. It was not the queen of Sweden that stood there—it was his cousin's murderer. It was not a woman—it was the champion of the old paganism in its cruelest form.

"Ah!" he cried, losing complete control of himself, "why should I marry *you* indeed? Well might I share my cousin's fate. You are heathen as a dog!"

With that, he struck her in the face with his glove.<sup>12</sup>

In all her fits of temper, Sigrid had never been so angry before. Burning alive in a house would be a mild fate for this scoundrel!

Olaf had risen, his handsome face was flushed, his blue eyes kindling. The queen also rose; she was pale as a ghost and swayed in her motions like a haughty lily in the wind.

"By Odin, that may cost you your life!" she said.

And thus they parted.

Olaf returned to his city by the Nid; Sigrid re-

turned to her estates. And the Spirit of the Ring—the little one-eyed man—danced merrily over the high cliffs, snapped his fingers, laughing, and called to the other trolls. For Sigrid the Haughty still believed in Odin and the Aasa folk, and her hate for the Christian Olaf was greater than the hate of all his other enemies.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Saga of King Olaf* by Longfellow begins with this incident. Longfellow has evidently followed Snorra in building this interesting collection of verses about the achievements of that great king.

<sup>2</sup>As told in the tale, *Olaf in Search of a Kingdom*.

<sup>3</sup>See the tale of *False Gods and True*.

<sup>4</sup>"The old pagan conceptions were not eradicated, however, through the hasty conversion. They gradually assumed Christian forms and continued to live in the religious life as well as in the songs and stories of the people. Christ was substituted for Odin as the divine ruler; King Olaf takes the place of Tor; Freya reappears as the Virgin Mary."—Gjerset.

<sup>5</sup>"The heroic and self-assertive women of the Viking Age," says Gjerset (*History of the Norwegian People*), "have a certain romantic charm; still woman had not yet been accorded her proper privilege in society or in the home. Marriage was not based on mutual love and affection, but on wealth and social standing. It was a business affair, a contract concluded between the bridegroom and the bride's father and relatives. The bride's consent was unnecessary, it is true, but it was often a matter of form, rather than the result of natural inclination.

"The Norseman had a keen and well-developed mind, but his heart was as hard as the steel of his sword. He loved the

battle and the stormy sea; he admired the strong, the brave, the cunning, the intellectual; for the old and feeble he had no interest, for the suffering, no sympathy; the weak he despised. He sang of valor and heroic deeds; not of love and beauty."

<sup>6</sup>Olaf's second wife, the Irish princess (see the story, *Olaf in Search of a Kingdom*), must have died, as he did not bring her with him when he returned to Norway, and the saga makes no further mention of her.

<sup>7</sup>This scene is one of the best from Longfellow's *Saga of King Olaf*:

"On King Olaf's bridal night  
Shines the moon with tender light  
And across the chamber streams  
Its tide of dreams.

"At the fatal midnight hour  
When all evil things have power  
In the glimmer of the moon  
Stands Gudrun.

"Close against her heaving breast,  
Something in her hand is pressed;  
Like an icicle, its sheen  
Is cold and keen.

"Like the drifting snow she sweeps  
To the couch where Olaf sleeps  
Suddenly he wakes and stirs,  
His eyes meet hers.

" 'What is that,' King Olaf said,  
 'Gleams so bright above my head?  
 Wherefore standest thou so white  
 In pale moonlight?'

" 'Tis the bodkin that I wear  
When at night I bind my hair;  
It woke me falling on the floor—  
'Tis nothing more.'



"Ere the earliest peep of morn  
 Blew King Olaf's bugle horn  
 And forever sundered, ride  
 Bridegroom and bride."

<sup>9</sup>Here is a striking example of the changed view-point of the Norsemen as they gave up their pagan beliefs and accepted the faith of Christ. Odin, their wonder-prince of the old days, dwindles to a troll. They have finally come to deny his divinity, but he has always been such a reality for them that they can not deny his existence. Now he wanders between earth and Heaven, a kind of deposed deity. His having only one eye is the principal mark by which he can be known. Odin was said to have traded one of his eyes for the wisdom of Mimer.

<sup>9</sup>This was North America. Thus the first discovery of the new continent by Europeans was the result of King Olaf's attempt to make the Far North Christian. It is strange to think that boys and girls of the Northland were actually reading about America before Columbus discovered it. Not only did they read about it in Snorra's tales, but in a number of other sagas, the best one being *The Saga of Erik the Red*. All kinds of stories were current about the newly discovered land, some of them quite mythical as the tale of the uniped—a creature with only one leg, but others, historical, giving true descriptions of the natives and the country. Some of the tales were quite thrilling; for example, how the Vikings became sick from eating whale meat, how the skraelings (Indians), tried to drive them away and how Freydis, the Viking woman, sharpened her sword on her breasts to frighten her pursuers.

<sup>10</sup>See the tale of *The Wonder Prince from Aasgaard*.

<sup>11</sup>Compare with the tale, *The Wolf's Heart*.

<sup>12</sup>Olaf's meeting with Sigrid evidently made a great impression on the Viking world, and the story was told and retold until it could hardly be recognized. In Denmark in the

twelfth century one version described the meeting as taking place on shipboard. According to the writer, Saxo, Olaf bade Sigrid "come over to him on his ship so they could talk there. A gang-plank was placed so that she could come on board, but when she trod on it, it was pulled away and she fell headlong into the water." After which Olaf's sailors laughed at her. "It was real Norwegian impudence," says Saxo.

## XVI

### THE CRUISE OF THE LONG SERPENT

*Olaf*, King of Norway

*Einar the Archer*

*Burislaf*, King of Vendland

*Eindrid*, a chieftain of the

*Torberg*, builder of the *Long*  
*Serpent*

crew of the *Long Serpent*

*Tyra*, Princess of Denmark

*Wolf the Red*

*Astrid*, Princess of Vendland

*Kolbiorn the Handsome*

PLACE: Trondhjem in Norway and Vendland.

TIME: Exactly 1000 A. D.

THE finest Viking ship ever built was the *Long Serpent*. It was made in the form of a dragon with gilded head and tail that stood high above the water. It was over two hundred feet long, had fifty-two oars on each side and carried a crew of six hundred men.

Torberg was the name of the clever carpenter appointed by King Olaf to be master-builder of the *Long Serpent*. Special men were selected to fell the great trees, others transported the trunks, skilled workmen fashioned the planks so that each fitted exactly in its place, others drove in the pegs and bound the ship together. The best artists in the Far North carved the designs with which the ship was covered.

When the completed masterpiece floated out for the first time, mirroring its glories in the clear



waters, there were great celebrations. King Olaf had just made a speech in behalf of Torberg and the crowds along the water-front were still cheering, when a woman making her way down to the edge of the fiord attracted general attention. She was evidently a person of high rank although no one could say who she was. Her dignity was such that the crowd yielded instinctively before her. A maid servant followed. Stopping before the king, she made a curtesy.

"May I congratulate Your Highness," said she, "on having built the most wonderful ship in the Far North.<sup>1</sup> It is indeed a worthy emblem of Norway's sea power and a fitting work for Olaf Trygva's son, the world's most noble Christian king."

"Yours are fair words," answered the king, acknowledging the lady's greeting. "May I ask the name of the fair speaker?"

"I am Tyra, Princess of Denmark," she replied, "and a Christian. But I was doomed to live in a pagan land until I fled and now seek you, champion of the true faith, for protection."

The face of the lady was care-worn.

"If the princess will follow," said Olaf, respectfully showing the way, "I hope to listen to her tale, and if her story is as convincing as her manner, I shall be honored to be her knight."

So King Olaf conducted the sad stately princess to the royal residence and she told her story.

"You know, of course, King Burislaf of Vendland," she began.

"I lived many years in Burislaf's realm," answered Olaf. "I married Burislaf's daughter!"

"I had forgotten that!" exclaimed the princess. "But you were surely not a Christian then?"

"No. And my gentle Geyra is long dead; so can have nothing to do with the present story."

The lady gave a sigh of relief.

"You can understand, then," she continued, "that Burislaf is hardly a fitting husband for a Christian. He is a cruel old pagan who worships the horrible god Svanevit. You can imagine my dismay when my brother, Fork-Beard, wanted me to marry him!"

"An old man like Burislaf is hardly a proper match for such a young princess," admitted Olaf. "What did you answer?"

"No!—of course," replied Tyra. "And my brother dispatched the word to Burislaf. But then—then my suitor sent the terrible Jom Viking, Earl Sigvald, to fetch me!"

"I have heard much about Earl Sigvald—a crafty man. He is also a friend of your brother."

"That is not the worst of it," Tyra went on. "I think he threatened my brother, for Fork-Beard

came to me and said that if I did not go, our family might lose the Danish throne. So I finally consented."

Tyra began to weep.

"I hope King Olaf will excuse my tears," she sobbed, "but it was a dreadful thing for me to do. Yes, I consented. We came to Vendland. The heathen rites in Svanevit's name were performed binding me, a Christian, to Burislaf. Oh, how I regretted it; how I wished for the smiling meadows of Denmark once again. Finally I could bear it no longer. I told them that as long as I had to be among them, I would neither eat nor drink. For seven days, I starved. On the eighth, escaped with my maid from his dreadful palace. Although I was very weak, no one hindered my going. But once free, I realized after all, I had no place to go. I dared not return to my brother's land. Then in my sorrow, I thought of Norway, I have fled to you, my Lord. All I ask, is permission to remain here."

The lady beseechingly lifted her eyes to Norway's ruler and through her tears, those eyes seemed like lakes of violet-blue. Olaf had always been a man of ideals and the story of Tyra's brave fight against oppression appealed to him. He himself had had an unhappy experience in a marriage arranged for him by others. He understood her difficulties. Not only would he permit her



to remain but, learning that she was without means, he insisted that she be his guest.

Tyra could hardly realize that she had now found a haven of rest. Her gratitude was unbounded. But Olaf was also grateful to Tyra; he felt strengthened by the confidence she had shown in him, and he was proud to learn that, in far-away lands, his name was known as a symbol of chivalry.

And a delightful guest Tyra was! She brought a charm, a softness with her as from some land where the cliffs did not rise so sharply from the sea, where the awfulness of nature was not ever-present, as in Norway. Beautiful she was; with a beauty of clean-chiseled features and noble bearing. Intelligent she was; with an intelligence that shone from her soulful eyes and found expression in every graceful gesture.

As summer ripened into autumn, Olaf's admiration for his fair guest ripened into a deeper feeling. When the heather covered the gray rocks with its purple glory, romance bloomed again in Olaf's soul. It thrilled him like an echo of that first romance, his love for Geyra in Vendland.

As for Tyra, Olaf was the knight of her dreams.

The wedding of Olaf with the princess from Denmark was a brilliant affair. The whole nation rejoiced that their noble ruler had found a fitting

helpmate. Olaf was the happiest man in the kingdom.

The autumns in Trondhjem are purple and golden; the winters are long and dark. The days grew shorter. Finally the sun was above the horizon only a few hours each day. Then it sank completely from sight. This twilight period fell like a dark mantle on Tyra's spirits; she became moody. Her light-hearted husband overwhelmed her with kindness, which only made her reproach herself the more that she had come to him without a dowry.

Spring came—but it did not dispel the veil of sadness that hung over Olaf's queen. She wept often.

When the king inquired why her heart seemed so heavy, she answered:

"Ah, dear Olaf, you have been so kind to me. It hurts my pride that I had to come to you without a dowry. A princess of Denmark is not wont to come thus to her bridegroom. Now I am indeed a queen, but also—a pauper."

Olaf attempted to cheer her, but she continued to weep.

"If you will really comfort me," said she finally, "you might fetch me my dower, for I do own property in Vendland."

"What property do you mean?" asked her husband.

"I received handsome presents from Burislaf," sobbed Tyra. "Oh, if I but had them now!"

"But you left King Burislaf," replied Olaf, "and I think we may well forget his presents; have I not enough for us both?"

To which Tyra answered, woman-like, with more tears:

"If only I had my property from Vendland!"

It was plain that the long winter had told on Tyra's disposition. But Olaf's nature was sunshine itself and he continued his attempts to dispel her gloom, paying her little attentions and catering to every caprice. Her mind, however, seemed to dwell more and more on the one theme.

"You were such a good friend of Burislaf's," she suggested one day. "I should think he would give you my property, if you only asked for it."

"But remember," objected Olaf, "you sought my protection against my former friend. How, then, can I ask that he send you the treasures you left of your own accord?"

"I am sure Burislaf would do anything you asked!" persisted the unhappy queen.

One morning Olaf saw the first spring flowers on the market. They were fresh-plucked, white and shining with morning dew, and Olaf brought them for his bride. When he went into the queen's apartments, he found the room darkened, while his wife sat moping in one corner.



"See what I have found for you!" cried Olaf cheerily.

Tyra thrust the proffered blossoms away.

"What shall I do with them?" asked she. "Can poor flowers replace my Vendland treasures? Ah, I begin to see what the matter is. You *dare* not go after my property. You are afraid of Burislaf; you are afraid of my brother—ha-ha-ha-ha—" and she laughed hysterically.

The rejected blossoms seemed to wilt at the insult and fell from Olaf's hand.

"Do you really mean that, Tyra?" he asked in a voice that sounded strange and far-away.

She gave no reply and he left the room.

There was excitement throughout the city. Banners were waving and crowds of people were assembling along the Nid where the wonderful ship, the *Long Serpent*, lay. For Olaf had sent out word that he was going on a cruise, a cruise to Vendland to claim the dower of Queen Tyra.

North and south, into the mountain fastnesses, to the gray depths of the most remote fiords, Olaf sent his messengers to assemble his bravest men for the Vendland quest. Not only the *Long Serpent* but the whole fleet of boats was being prepared for the journey. A little way out in the fiord lay the *Little Serpent*, another fine ship with golden head and knotted dragon tail. Near by was *The Crane*

and farther along was a striking-looking boat with no prow, which had a striped sail unfurled from the mast. And there were many others. Such a gathering of ships the people of Trondhjem had never seen and they swarmed out on the hills to view the array.

"See the *Little Serpent*," called Eindrid the warrior to his son Einar. "It is not so big as the *Long Serpent* but it is finely fashioned. One could tell that a magician had built it. With its sail spread it is almost like a real dragon with wings."

"The ship without a figurehead—what is that?" asked the lad.

"It belongs to Erling, the chieftain from Sola," answered the father. "She shall follow our king as shall the bravest and best sons of Norway."

"And you are going too, father!" exclaimed the young man. "If you could only take me with you!"

"No, Einar," smiled the elder, "some of us must remain at home. The king is taking only the seasoned warriors; he must have need of us. You are a good marksman, to be sure, but you are only eighteen."

The lad looked wistfully across the water at the gallant pageant. Those sea monsters would soon be plowing through foreign oceans, carrying his father and the others out to the great world of adventure. He longed to go with them.

"Your ship, too, looks brave," cried the boy, pointing toward it. "Don't you think you might find room for me?"

"Only the seasoned warriors will be chosen," answered Eindrid, smiling and shaking his head.

It was a picked crew, selected to man the fleet that was to sail out in quest of the treasures of Tyra. Strong, athletic, well-trained warriors, all; but the crew chosen for the *Long Serpent* was superior, even to the rest. Every member was a sturdy, tried Viking in his prime, no one under twenty years of age and no one over sixty. (That a man could be considered in his prime at sixty—what a tribute to Viking training!) The daring, shaggy-haired fighter, Wolf the Red, was chosen to be standard-bearer on the royal ship. Kolbiorn was the name of one of the handsomest; he stood like a god from Aasgaard, his coat of mail faultless and shining, a scarlet mantle streaming from his shoulders.<sup>2</sup>

Olaf had personally picked out every man who should sail on the *Long Serpent*, and practically all of the six hundred places were now filled.

"There is a messenger here from your chieftain, Eindrid," announced a servant to the king as he went about the palace grounds superintending preparations.

"Let him come here," answered the busy mon-



arch, and in a moment a tall, light-haired young man stood before him.

"I come from my father, Your Highness," explained Einar respectfully, "but not in his behalf. Although my father commands one of the ships that is to accompany the king, he will not take me in his crew. I'm sure that I am strong and brave enough and I am not a bad marksman, as I can prove. Forgive my boldness, but could not Your Majesty recommend me to my father?"

The king gazed at the lad for a moment.

"You are very young," he said.

"Eighteen, my Lord," answered Einar.

"My men should be at least twenty years of age," answered Olaf. "But," he continued, seeing the disappointment on the earnest young face, "I don't mind seeing how well you can shoot. Norway will always need clever marksmen. Here is a bow."

The bow was a heavy one but yielded easily as the youth pulled on it. A mark was chosen. The arrow sped. Olaf noticed the clear eye that took aim, the sure firm touch that directed the shaft and the sinewy arm that furnished the power. The arrow found home as though it had been placed there by hand. Here was an archer that gave promise.

"Try again," said Olaf.

Einar took another arrow and a more difficult

mark was chosen. Again the bow was drawn, the clear eye took aim. The arrow flew. It was as good a shot as the first.

"Well done!" cried the king, who was a great admirer of good sportsmanship. Then he asked Einar a number of questions and found the young athlete as alert in mind as in body.

"I am sorry," said Olaf, finally, "that my chieftain Eindrid can not find a place for his son. I really think you measure up to his standard, but I do not feel that I can ask him to change his plans."

This was a blow to Einar for he felt that he had made a good showing and hoped for the king's favor. His hands fell limply to his side; his lip trembled.

"The quest then, is not for me!" he said slowly.

"Not on your father's ship," answered King Olaf, "but would you like to go on mine?"

"Will you take me?" cried the lad, at once aglow with excitement.

"There is one place left—for the best marksman in Norway; Einar may have it if he will."

It was wonderful news Einar had for his father when he came home that evening. He was to go on the quest as one of the crew of the *Long Serpent*. Old Eindrid listened coolly to the lad's excited account of the day's adventure, but within, his heart swelled with a fatherly pride.



"Well done!" cried the king, who was a great admirer of good sportsmanship.





"He is much too young; a stripling with no experience!" was the comment of many an old warrior, when the news of Einar's success became generally known. But many a fair maid of Trondhjem turned to look when Einar, trim and triumphant, passed their way; it was plain that in their eyes, at least, he was worthy of the distinction.

A midnight sun resting on the horizon turned the edges of the banked-up clouds to gold and crimson. It seemed as if Aasgaard, the mystical abode of the gods, floated there and the aspect of that magical city changed for every moment. The fiord glittered as though Freya had strewn it with her jewels and long reaches of rock blushed purple in the clear ethereality of a Norwegian summer night. Nature had taken on her most splendid attire to match the splendor of the marvelous fleet that was sailing away.

Out through the river and the narrow fiord they sailed, into the broader sea. First the majestic *Long Serpent* and after a swarm of gay and golden boats, lifting their prows proudly over the foam. And proud they well might be, for they held the flower of Norway's manhood under the leadership of the bravest and noblest of kings—Olaf, Trygva's son.

Watch them, Tyra. Follow them as they make their way out—out. Now they are mere specks,—

but that spot of gold is the *Long Serpent*; there sails Olaf your husband who is hazarding all this glory for love of you! Are you not proud of him?

Mount, now, to your tower window. You can still see them, far, far away where one ray of pale sunlight touches the water. Is there a shade of regret in those eyes of violet-blue? Do you still long for your Vendland treasures?

Light hearts throbbed in stalwart breasts as the stately fleet sped over the foam toward Vendland. Like a pageant, the ships thread their way through the islands along the coast, they round the southern-most point; they skirt the smiling lands of Denmark and now they mirror their splendors in the Baltic Sea.

But no one was happier than Einar the archer, youngest member of the king's own crew. His golden opportunity had come. He saw daily the sovereign whose praise he had so often heard; he sat with him at table and listened when the king would chat and jest; he saw the tricks of skill with which Olaf would entertain the company.

Olaf was in the best of spirits. It had been many a day since he had been on such an adventure and his Viking blood stirred with the old-time joy.

"See," cried Einar to a companion one day, "what is the king going to do now?"

Olaf had leaped over the side of the ship and was walking along on the oars!



"Come, Einar," called the king. "Let me have your sword."

Einar handed over his short sword, and Olaf, having borrowed two others, began to juggle with all three. As he stepped lightly and dexterously from one oar to the next, he kept all three swords flying through the air.

"So!" he cried at last, catching all three and returning one to Einar. "You shoot well, my lad, but can you do *my* little trick?"

Einar agreed that he could not.

Later, Einar saw that the king could throw two spears at the same time and that he could strike as well with his left hand as with his right. He had never seen any one man that could excel in so many ways. And yet Olaf was always as modest as he was kind. No one could be gentler, none gayer than he. All the men on the *Long Serpent* admired their valiant leader but none more than Einar. He felt that he was there among that picked crew, only because he had been chosen by the bravest, kindest and finest man in the world.

"If only I may have a chance to show my gratitude some day," thought the young marksman. "If King Olaf ever stands in need, he will find Einar at his side." And he twanged his bow-string so that the great bow quivered again.

They came to Vendland. Their quest had of course been heralded in advance, but Olaf had not

expected the friendliness shown by the crowd assembled to greet them. He was pleased indeed, and doubly pleased when from the crowd there came one whose face and form were familiar from the Long Ago. It was Astrid, the gray-eyed sister of Geyra, the wife of his youth. The Princess Astrid was older and paler now, but the frank smile and hearty pressure of the hand were the same as of yore.

"We have heard of your quest," said Astrid, "and I shall do all in my power to help you."

"But, Astrid," answered Olaf, "do you really understand my mission? It is no easy thing I seek—your father's gifts to the Princess Tyra, who left *him* to be *my* wife."

"Whatever Olaf asks must have consideration," replied the princess. "We have not forgotten you, dear friend, nor the love you bore Geyra nor the help you gave my father at the Danevirke. Vendland still remembers Olaf, although he is now a Christian king and wedded to Tyra."

"Your words are kinder than I deserve," whispered the Norseman humbly. "But they bring me joy and solve a great difficulty."

Astrid had told the truth. Gruff King Burislaf himself welcomed his former son-in-law with only a little less cordiality than his daughter had done, and the fierce worshiper of Svanevit accompanied the Christian king to shed an honest tear at Geyra's

grave. As for the gifts to Tyra, no one had touched them and Olaf was welcome to them all. The old pagan did not even seem envious that Olaf had been the more favored suitor!

All summer King Olaf and his men enjoyed the hospitality of Burislaf. There were feasts and games and friendly tests of skill between the Vends and the Vikings. Wolf the Red and the handsome Kolbiorn became as well-known in Vendland as on the market-place at Trondhjem and not the least fêted was Einar the youthful marksman. But in distinction, appearance and popularity King Olaf surpassed them all. He found many old friends and made new ones.

The cruise of the *Long Serpent* had been a success. As summer waned the gay-hearted men loaded Tyra's treasures on board and prepared to sail back to Norway.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Two Viking ships are still in existence which give one an idea as to what the *Long Serpent* was like, although they are only about one-third the size of Olaf's ship. They are known as the *Gokstad* and *Oseberg* ships from the names of the places where they were found. Although they are from an earlier period than Olaf's they are surprisingly well-preserved, having been buried in the graves of their owners. They were filled with interesting articles which can now be seen in the museum at Christiania, and which show a surprising culture for those so-called Dark Ages. The *Oseberg* ship undoubtedly belonged to a Princess Aasa (*Ose-berg* evidently means "Aasa's



grave") from whom King Olaf was directly descended as she was the grandmother of King Harald of the Fair Hair. A beautiful carved sledge belonging to the lady was among the articles found in the buried ship and can still be seen in the museum. Then there is a handsome wooden car and many articles for domestic use besides parts of the ship itself—the oars, the anchor, bits of the rope that tied the sails, buckets to bail out water and as a final hint of former glory, glistening bits of peacock plumes taken from the dust in the hold—all tangible remnants of some interesting personality that speaks to us through the silences of a thousand years.

A model of the *Gokstad* ship was actually sailed across the Atlantic by a Norwegian crew in 1893, to the World's Fair at Chicago, where it can still be seen.

<sup>2</sup>A similar Viking warrior is described by Anna Comnena, the daughter of Emperor Alexius (in *Alexiadis libri XIX*) as follows: "He was so tall that he carried his head above the largest men. He had ruddy cheeks, blond hair, broad shoulders and clear blue eyes, which seemed to flash fire. He was slender where he should be slender, and broad where he should be broad—in short he was from top to toe as if moulded and turned, a perfectly beautiful man, as I have heard many declare."

<sup>3</sup>The cruise of the *Long Serpent* is perhaps the most spectacular incident of the Viking Age. "What the real purpose of the expedition may have been is not apparent," says Gjerset in his *History of the Norwegian People*, "though it seems reasonable to suppose that it was something more weighty than the collection of the queen's inheritance. The *Historia Norwegiae* states that Olaf had forty missionaries with him on the *Long Serpent*. This gives it to some degree, the appearance of a crusade undertaken, possibly, for the purpose of Christianizing the Vends."

The same historian (Gjerset) speaking of King Olaf, says:

"Olaf Trygvason was the most chivalric and heroic of all the early kings of Norway. Saga and tradition extol him as a leader of men, a beau ideal of a hero. The *Olaf Trygvason's Saga* says, 'King Olaf was in all respects the most capable man in Norway of whom there is any record.' He possessed the indomitable energy of a crusading warrior, he was the brilliant man of action, who dazzled his followers with ever-new exploits. His charming and inspiring personality won the hearts and fascinated the minds of his countrymen and he became popular as no other king in Norway."

## XVII

### SIGRID'S REVENGE<sup>1</sup>

*Olaf*, King of Norway  
*Sven Fork-Beard*, King of  
Denmark  
*The King of Sweden*  
*Erik*, the outlawed Earl of  
Trondhjem

*Sigvald*, Earl of the Jom  
Vikings  
*Sigrid*, Queen of Denmark  
and Queen-Mother of  
Sweden  
*Astrid*, Princess of Vendland  
*Tyra*, Queen of Norway

<i>Einar, the Archer</i>	} Of the crew of the <i>Long-Serpent</i>
<i>Wolf, the Red</i>	
<i>Kolbiorn, the Handsome</i>	

PLACE: Denmark and Vendland, especially the island of Svold.

TIME: 1000 A. D.

“Still on her scornful face,  
Blushing with deep disgrace,  
Bore she the crimson trace  
Of Olaf’s gauntlet;  
Like a malignant star,  
Blazing in heaven afar,  
Red shone the angry scar  
Under her frontlet.”

FROM LONGFELLOW’S *Saga of King Olaf*.

“DO you see this scar?” cried Sigrid the  
Haughty, as she pointed to the ugly mark  
on her cheek. “No, don’t turn away,” she added  
as her husband, King Fork-Beard, rose to go.  
“You are weary of hearing about it, but every day  
you *shall* hear until you take revenge on King  
Olaf.”



The king shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you think I made you Queen of Denmark," he asked, "just to hear this tale over and again? I am not fond of King Olaf myself— But what can be done?"

"Done?" shrieked the elderly woman—her scar throbbled red with her anger. "King Olaf sails into your clutches with the whole of his fleet and you ask what shall be done! This Christian wretch struck me with his glove. He said I was heathen as a dog. Then he married your sister Tyra against your will. Now he flaunts his triumph by cruising through your waters. Ah, if I were a man, not one of Olaf's ships would ever find its way back to Norway!"

"Indeed, Sigrid," expostulated the king, "I should be quite as glad as you to see the overbearing fellow humbled. In *our* union, Denmark and Sweden find themselves united and it ought to be possible to bend Norway to our will. But Olaf is stronger than either of us, perhaps than both. What do you advise?"

"Have I married a coward?" asked Sigrid the Haughty with curling lip. "My son is king of Sweden; he stands ready at my call with his fleet. Erik, the outlawed earl, is at our court and would gladly help us against the king who drove him into exile. You can be sure of your Danish fleet. Fie! I thought I had married a man!"

The taunt found home.

"I will follow any plan you approve," answered Fork-Beard meekly.

Sigrid's eyes glowed, brighter even than her scar.

"Now," she muttered, "I have them all,—all allied against him. Olaf is but a little prince in the eyes of one who is twice a queen, and little princes may fear the revenge of Sigrid the Haughty!

"Summon my son," she called imperiously. "And Earl Erik, the outlaw, and also the crafty Sigvald, Earl of the Jom Vikings. We shall have need for all our friends to humble this upstart. Ah," she panted in a terrible ecstasy of bitterness, "Olaf shall see how much his Christendom avails against the might of Sigrid and her heathen gods. He shall kneel in this room, and I shall plant my foot on his neck!"

King Olaf, quite innocent of Sigrid's plans concerning his future, had spent a pleasant summer in Vendland but was preparing to return home to Norway. His fleet, the most wonderful Viking pageant ever seen, had hoisted its sails. Each oar was manned by a picked sailor. These were the flower of Norway's chivalry; they had come on an adventurous quest with their beloved king. But now the quest was over, the sought-for dower of Queen Tyra had been found. They breathed in deep breaths of the salty air and their thoughts

longed back to their own land whose deep fiords and pine-clad mountains called them.

Then came Sigvald, the crafty Earl of the Jom Vikings, and said to Norway's king.

"You are indeed a noble man, King Olaf; all who meet you honor you. But there is one who has been my friend longer than you who is angry with you. I mean, King Fork-Beard of Denmark. He can not forgive you that you wed his sister Tyra and he is waiting by the island of Svold to destroy your fleet. It is a shame that two such noble men should fight; I would feel that I had done both a service if I could prevent it. Now I know the channel and if you will trust me, I shall pilot you beyond the island to safety."

Astrid, the gray-eyed wife of Sigvald, also came to King Olaf.

"Dear Olaf," she said, "dear brother—for you have been as near and dear as a brother to me—listen, I pray, to my husband. I confess with shame that he was sent here to spy on you, but I have persuaded him to help rather than betray you. Listen! Your worst enemy is not Fork-Beard but his new queen, Sigrid the Haughty. She hates you with the hate of death and has combined a force far greater than yours, to crush you."

Olaf was not a coward, but he had come to Vendland on a mission for his queen, and did not wish to sail deliberately into the trap of his enemies.



So he thanked the kind Astrid and agreed to follow Earl Sigvald who promised the assistance of his own fleet in case there should be trouble. Their many friends bade the stalwart men adieu. The ships spread eager wings for their flight over the shining Baltic.

"Follow my lead!" warned Earl Sigvald. "I know the channel where the largest ships must sail."

And Olaf, trusting the husband of Astrid, his lifelong friend, followed with his largest ships—eleven in all—while he commanded his chieftain Erling to pilot the main part of his fleet, about fifty smaller vessels, directly out to sea.

It was a beautiful day in the late summer. A crisp breeze stung the waters until every wavelet trembled with a crest of foam, and the wind brought joy and thoughts of home to the sailor lads. Like a school of graceful serpents, Olaf's stately ships floated over the steely-blue sound, while the smaller craft faded into the hazy distances of the open sea. How caressingly the foamy billows leaped around the golden prows! How benignly the cold clear sunshine—a sunshine known only in those northern lands—shone on the brave array and mirrored its splendors in the trembling deep. Who could have dreamed the fate that awaited them?

But Sigrid the Haughty had dreamed it. And

all those whom she had united to wreak her revenge on Olaf awaited his coming at the Island of Svold. Hidden behind bare cliffs in the lee of the island lay the assembled fleets of Denmark and Sweden, and even better-manned than these, the picked fleet of the outlaw Earl Erik and his seasoned Viking crew.

In a sheltered point of the island, the three leaders stood and watched for Olaf's coming.

"What a beautiful vessel!" exclaimed both kings at once, as a noble craft floated into view. "It must be the *Long Serpent*."

"This is not the *Long Serpent*," replied Earl Erik.

Erik was right; it was the chieftain Eindrid's ship.

"See!" cried the king of Sweden, as another majestic vessel appeared, "Olaf is afraid some enemy might recognize him and has taken the serpent's head from his prow."

"That is not the *Long Serpent*," repeated Erik. "I know that striped sail; it belongs to the chieftain Erling's boat. Let them sail by. Olaf will miss them when the crisis comes."

And these two craft which belonged among Olaf's smaller ships sailed proudly out to the open sea.

Next came eleven sturdy-built galleys sailing bravely on. These were recognized at once; they

belonged to Sigvald, the crafty earl of the Jom Vikings.

As they looked, these ships altered their course and sailed in toward the island.

Then three imposing sea-monsters floated on, one of them unusually large.

"The *Long Serpent* at last!" declared the king of Sweden. "Let us board our ships!"

But the canny Earl Erik answered: "They have many fine vessels. Let us wait."

The warriors now began to be uneasy.

"Earl Erik is afraid," they whispered, "and will not avenge his father's death. It is a shame. What will the world say when it knows that we lay quietly here and allowed Olaf to sail by unchallenged?"

But while they were talking, four more giants of the deep floated into view and one of them was a dragon of monstrous proportions. Up sprang King Fork-Beard.

"High shall the *Long Serpent* bear me to-night, for I shall command it!" he cried.

The assemblage gazed in admiration as the graceful ship glided over the waves.

"What a beauty!" exclaimed one.

"It was indeed a noble work to build such a vessel," said another.

"Very well," thought Erik, the banished earl.

"Even if Olaf had no larger ships than this one,



King Fork-Beard with his fleet alone, would never capture it."

Down to their ships hurried the eager warriors for the time to attack had come. Canvass coverings were removed and a sea of ships bristled in war trim. Even a school of golden serpents might well beware of such as these.

But the kings still stood transfixed to the spot, for their eyes, as it were, had looked straight into Aasgaard, the city of the gods. Was it, indeed, a vision? Three more ships had come into sight and a fourth so wonderfully beautiful that it seemed the gods themselves must have built it. But it was not Odin's magic ship; it was the *Long Serpent*. The two wonder-boats that went before had been the *Little Serpent* and the *Crane*.

The illusion lasted only a moment. The words of Sigrid the Haughty rang in their ears.

"Take care lest Olaf flaunt his triumph over you!"

"Down with King Olaf of Norway," they cried, and hurried to their ships.

The agreement was that if the battle was won, Norway should be divided among the two kings and Earl Erik; the *Long Serpent* should become the property of whichever leader first mounted it, and the god-like Olaf should be humbled in the presence of Sigrid the Haughty.

As Olaf's fleet rounded the island it was noticed

that the ships of their guide, the wily Sigvald, furled their sails and rowed in toward the shore. The commander of the *Crane* followed Sigvald's example, calling out to know what was the matter.

"I think that trouble is at hand!" cried Earl Sigvald.

Then came the *Little Serpent* with three other ships, and receiving the same message, they also furled their sails. And King Olaf in the *Long Serpent* had no sooner joined them—than the whole of the enemy fleet sailed out against them!

A wave of uncertainty came over Olaf's sailor lads; a company that otherwise had never known fear.

"Full speed ahead!" cried some.

But Olaf stood up in the stern of the *Long Serpent* and called:

"Hold, my men, let the sails fall. Our lives are in the hands of God!"

Then he blew the call to battle and the ever-obedient giant serpents glided into line, an imposing sight indeed with the royal ship in the center flanked by the *Little Serpent* and the *Crane*.

"Shoot the *Long Serpent* farther forward!" shouts Olaf.

They are binding the bows together and the royal ship being so much longer than the others lies with its stern farther back.

"It will be hard to defend the foremast," an-

swered Wolf the Red, "if we shoot the bow so far in front."

"I did not know," came the king's answer, "that my standard-bearer was both red and afraid!"<sup>2</sup>

"See that you are no more afraid at your post than I at mine!" replied the Red Wolf sharply.

Olaf in great anger set an arrow on his bow-string and took aim at his standard-bearer.

"Keep that shot for one who better deserves it," shouted Wolf. "Whatever I do is for your sake, oh, King."

So Olaf spared his arrow.

King Olaf stood on the high deck where he could oversee the fighting. An inspiring sight he was indeed, his golden shield on his arm, a short scarlet cloak thrown over his coat-of-mail and his helmet glistening in the cold sunshine. He was like some fair god returned to redeem his people.

The enemy fleet had also formed a line—and a terrible line it was, dwarfing the array of Olaf's eleven haughty serpents. It seemed to stretch interminably to either side, swarming with myriads of men and flaunting the banners of many a clan and kingdom.

"Whose flag is that, just across from us?" asks Olaf.

"King Fork-Beard's," answered his archer, the young Einar.

"He shall never defeat us with all his Danish



horde," cries the proud king of Norway. "But whose men are those, where the banners flutter on the right?"

"The King of Sweden leads that army," replies Einar.

"Those heathen should have stayed at home," laughs Olaf. "They would find more pleasure in Sigrid's bloody sacrifices than in fighting a Christian king. But those large ships beyond the Danes?"

"They belong to Erik, your exiled earl."<sup>3</sup>

"Ah," answers the fair-haired king, "he, at least, has reason to challenge us. We must expect sharp fighting in that quarter; they are also from Norway."

Now the enemy kings divide their forces into three fleets which bear simultaneously down on Olaf's eleven dragons. The Danish king brings directly up before the wonder ship, the Swedish king opens attack on a vessel farthest to the right, and Earl Erik on the one farthest to the left. The battle breaks like a thunderstorm!

And where, pray, is Earl Sigvald, the Jom Viking who promised his aid in case of danger? His fleet still lies with furled sails close by the island. Even with his assistance, Olaf's chances would be slender, so the wily earl prefers to await developments. Not so his wife Astrid. She rides there in her own ship, manned by Vendland sailors eager

to sail at once to the scene of combat. But her men shake their heads when she questions them and advise her to wait with the rest.

Long afterward sang the skalds:

"I can well understand that Earl Sigvald,  
The chief who withdrew from the combat  
Was sorely missed by King Olaf.

(Many men fled from that battle!).

So must the hero from Norway  
Fight against two kings together;

(Noble my theme is to sing—)

And Erik the Earl was against him!"<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile the strife around the royal ship went badly for Olaf's opponents. Down from the high prows of the *Long Serpent* and her sister ships, the Norwegians cast grappling hooks and anchors to the decks of the Danish vessels and then bore down on the crews with their weapons. Boat after boat came into the claws of the three big dragons and were cleared of their men. King Fork-Beard's chances of riding high on the *Long Serpent* were dwindling rapidly! Before he realized what had happened, he himself was driven from *his* ship and Olaf's followers were in command of it. Sigrid's husband, however, managed to board another craft outside the line of action and from there watched the fray.

Then came Sigrid's son, the Swedish king. He

pressed forward in his stepfather's stead, trying to wrest the wonder-ship from its hated owner. But his losses at once became so heavy that he was forced to withdraw, exhausted, after a short and fierce attack.

The only place where it has been going well for Olaf's enemies is where they are led by Erik the Earl. He has been attacking with full force not the center, but the golden monster lying farthest to the left. His own boat, the *Beard*, plunges against the side of this out-post on Olaf's line, while other vessels attack her from the front. The *Beard* is not built like the other ships; instead of a golden prow, it has a grim heavy front rising straight from the water's edge and termed the "*Beard*" while down below the surface, this front becomes a thick iron plate. The *Beard* swings against its opponent like a terrible battering-ram. While the men on Olaf's golden monster are occupied with defending the front, the people from the *Beard* swarm up her side. The ship is taken. It is cut from the line. That leaves the next ship more open to attack, and again Earl Erik begins with his deadly battering-ram. Valiantly done, Earl Erik! But you are losing your men. The best are falling thick on the deck about you.

Now the Danes and the Swedes see where the real progress is being made. Many have retreated to safety, beyond the line of battle, but Erik's



dogged attack renews their courage. Suddenly the earl notices that his thinning ranks are no longer so thin. The two enemy kings return to the fray and urge their followers from the ships captured by Olaf, to rally around the fierce Erik. From all sides they are gradually closing in on Olaf's center—on the *Long Serpent*.

The battle rages like a devouring fire, a fire that is withering the flower of Norway in its devastating blast. The fury of the war-flames is fiercest around the *Little Serpent*. It is taken. . . . Now the *Crane* is the center of the conflagration . . . and its golden pride is humbled as Erik cuts it from the bonds that hold it to Olaf's royal ship . . . and now only that one is left, the mighty *Long Serpent*, but crunching against its side while missiles rain on every hand, is the terrible iron *Beard*.

Erik, eager as the hunter about to capture his prey, stands at the foremast urging his men. He has caused a rampart of shields to be arrayed against the side of the *Long Serpent* and over and around them there is a hand-to-hand fight between the bravest and best warriors that Norway ever produced. They strike with javelins; they throw whatever can be used as a weapon. Spears! Battle-axes! A forest of swarthy bows from which swarms of arrows come singing like wind through the trees.

Like vultures about a dying lion, the Danish and Swedish boats cluster around the *Long Serpent*. Olaf's men are now so angry that they try to board these boats to kill such of their opponents as have avoided a hand-to-hand encounter. In their desperation they forget they are not fighting on a level rampart and as the ships heave and sway, many go over the sides and sink, full-weaponed, to the bottom. Poor lads! Their efforts are mighty—the results fruitless.

“Down from that ship they sank,  
Down from the thick of the battle;  
Wounded they were, but unyielding,  
They fought to the very end.  
Even if Olaf their hero,  
Had saved the *Long Serpent* for Norway,  
Such valiant fellows as these  
Would have sadly been missed by their leader.”

So sang the bard afterward.

Einar, the archer, stands at his post and shoots with all his might and main. He is only eighteen—King Olaf took him on the *Long Serpent* against the advice of others—but now his turn has come to prove the wisdom of his king's choice. No shots are more telling than those from Einar's bow. Suddenly he spies Olaf's most dangerous enemy.

As Erik, the Earl, stands in a fairly safe position where he can direct the final attack, an arrow trem-

bles in the mast just over his head. It is buried to the shaft in the wood.

"A mighty shot!" he cries, startled. "Who sent that arrow?"

Another dart sings through the air. It comes so close—the earl lifts his arm—and the arrow strikes between the uplifted arm and his side. The point penetrates straight through a board.

"Come," calls Erik, the Earl, to his crack marksman, "take that tall fellow standing at the stern."

The marksman, who is a Finn, shoots. Is there something of the Finnish magic in that shot? Or do the Norse gods direct that dart in their last effort against Olaf the champion of Christ?

As Einar is again stretching his bow, the weapon falls in two parts. The Finn's arrow met it squarely and neatly parted it in two.

"What broke?" calls King Olaf from the thick of the fight.

"Norway—from thy hand, oh, King!"<sup>5</sup> cries the lad as he gazes at his shattered weapon, symbol of his broken hopes.

"It is not so bad as that!" calls the king, tossing him his own bow. "Try mine!"

Einar caught it and his sinewy young arm strained with the effort as he drew it back. The bow went beyond the arrow's head.

"Too weak—too weak is my Lord's bow!" he



cries, and he grasps sword and shield to make a last standing fight for the king.

Exposed on the deck's highest point stands King Olaf like a lion at bay. Now he shoots with his bow, now he casts a javelin and always two arrows or spears at a time. And around him his dwindling band of faithful retainers swing their swords with superhuman strokes in this life-or-death struggle.

"Your swords?" shouts the king. "What is the matter with your swords, my men?"

He notices that in spite of their powerful strokes, the swords themselves do not "bite" as is their wont.

"Our swords are worn out, oh, King!" answers Wolf the Red.

"We have more swords!" calls Olaf cheeringly, and disappears for a moment in the fore-cabin. He is back in a second; he has brought a new supply from the chest under the High Seat and these he distributes among his men. And one who saw that brave hand reach into the chest, saw blood running down beneath the coat of mail; but no one to this day knows where the king was wounded.

Fore and aft, the sides of the *Long Serpent* were unusually high. The middle of the ship was more open to attack, here the men fell thickest and here Earl Erik resolved to go on board.

Fifteen men of the enemy stand on the royal ves-

sel—and then comes the earl himself. A blot indeed on Norway's honor. Every man of the fifteen is killed or wounded and Earl Erik must retreat to the *Beard*.

More men fall on the *Long Serpent*, and Earl Erik ventures another try. Never was there such desperate fighting in all the Far North. From bow to stern the last remnants of Olaf's wondercrew rushed to force Erik's retreat.

The bow stands undefended. And the stern.

In a few minutes other attacking parties, Danes, Swedes, are swarming in at both ends.

Olaf's guardian angel has hidden her face. Perhaps she is weeping. A glint of white and gold! The hum of the Valkyries—the first war-maidens—is in the air. Do they chant Odin's triumph-song? . . . Hark! the terrible rattle of Tor's chariot. All the forces of the heathen world assembled by Queen Sigrid are about to overwhelm her victim.

"He said I was heathen as a dog, but my foot shall be upon his neck!"

Does Olaf remember his rash words or realize the humiliation in store for him?

The handful of men who can still move have clustered around their beloved king. The enemies' ships heave and crunch against the dismantled *Long Serpent*. The eager warriors clamber over the sides.

Olaf has lost; the flower of Norway's youth lies bleeding on the deck or heavily-armor-laden at the bottom of the Baltic Sea. Little cutters have been cruising around, the occupants despatching those who still struggle in the water, turning the ocean crimson with their life's blood. But the men in the cutters will not kill King Olaf, for Olaf shall be taken alive, the royal prisoner for a queen!

A splendid figure stands at the *Long Serpent's* edge. A golden shield glitters on his arm, a short scarlet cloak is thrown over his coat of mail and his helmet glistens in the rays of the setting sun. The figure leaps, holding his shield under him as a defense against the spear-points. He falls into the sea, but the shield hinders him from sinking and he is surrounded by the small cutters.

"Olaf!" shriek the victors joyfully, as they drag at the god-like figure and finally secure him fast. Up to the conqueror, Earl Erik, they bring their prize. "Queen Sigrid's booty—the king himself!" they announce.

But Erik shakes his head.

"I know you, Kolbiorn," said he to the silent prisoner. "And I know that you resemble your king not only in appearance but in valor. You have made a good fight and I give my word that you return unharmed to Norway."

Another prisoner, a pale and haggard youth, receives the same promise when they carry him ex-



hausted to the earl. It is Einar of the broken bow.<sup>6</sup>

But Olaf had leaped at the same time Kolbiorn did, but from the other side, and, holding his shield over him, sunk unseen into the deep.

Meanwhile Sigvald, the wily Jom Viking, lies quietly in the harbor, waiting. A cry comes on the wind. . . . It swells over the din of battle which seems to lull away. . . . It is the wild cry of triumph! Sigvald recognizes it and bids his ships sail out to greet the conqueror, Earl Erik, who stands on the high deck of the *Long Serpent*, his well-won prize.

One ship, however, does not follow, Astrid's ship. Its sails flutter in the wind but it turns its course away from the victors, back toward Vendland. The gentle gray-eyed lady trembles as she hears the victorious cries. She hides her face in her hands. Still comes the shouting, faint on the wind. She fears the worse; Olaf the friend of her youth, her hero-king, has fallen. Oh, why were her well-meant words in vain!

But there may be another reason why Astrid's boat skims so boldly over the waves and her men so eagerly ply their oars. Some say that Olaf freed himself from his armor, swam under water from the tumult, and that Astrid took him on board her ship.

Perhaps she brought him far from the victors

quarreling over their spoils, to Vendland, the land of his first love, where she nursed the wounded warrior back to health.

Or perhaps the fair head found rest in Astrid's tender embrace and the hero died in her arms.

At any rate, the revenge of Sigrid is incomplete. That haughty foot is never placed on Olaf's neck. No cowering Christian king is dragged into her presence, however she may call upon her heathen gods and curse her triumphant husband.

In Trondhjem, a sad-eyed queen<sup>7</sup> sits in her tower by the sea. Gray are the clouds that gather over tumultuous waters and gray are her thoughts as she gropes among them for some ray of hope to lighten her grief. Strain your eyes, Queen Tyra, as you look out over the sea. Look and look again through the gathering mist. To-day, and to-morrow, and the next day; next week, next month, next year! Your hair may turn white as the snow, you may offer twenty times your Vendland dower, but your greatest treasure, your Olaf, you will never see again.

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<sup>7</sup>This tale ends *The Saga of Olaf Trygvason*, bringing the story of the princes of Frey down to the year 1000, roughly speaking, the end of the Viking Age. The remaining part of Snorra's *Heimskringla* (more than two-thirds) deals with other princes of Frey down to Snorra's own time. The spirit of the old Viking inspires a line of crusaders who fare forth as Olaf did, champions of the new faith, harvesting honor and glory

for Norway. Even Earl Erik who returns to power in Trondhjem after Olaf's fall, becomes a Christian and rules his people well.

<sup>2</sup>"Red and afraid" in the original Icelandic (and Norwegian) is a pun which this incident has made famous in the Far North.

<sup>3</sup>Erik's brave fighting will be remembered from *The Vows of the Jom Vikings*.

<sup>4</sup>This is practically an exact translation of one of the fragments of skaldic verse which Snorra in the same manner interpolates in his narrative.

<sup>5</sup>The saga deliberately suggests that it was black magic that directed the shot which "broke Norway" from Olaf's hands. The fact that a Finn was the sender of the arrow confirms the idea, in Snorra's eyes.

<sup>6</sup>Later, Einar is the hero of many another tale of prowess in the saga lore of the Far North. Earl Erik's generosity in pardoning him reminds us of how he previously pardoned the Jom Vikings (in *The Vows of the Jom Vikings*). That Olaf's conqueror is the noble Erik makes the bitterness of that defeat a little less bitter. Of all Olaf's opponents, Erik has the most right to seek his downfall, for he has his father's death to avenge. This is the final scene in a drama that has been going on involving the members of two families for generations. Snorra's *Heimskringla* deals with generations of people rather than people. Erik's father Haakon and his grandfather Sigurd were constantly involved with Olaf's family, "the sons of Frey," who are of course the heroes of Snorra's tale. And Snorra traces the different characteristics of the individuals carefully, showing how the same traits appear in father, son and grandson.

<sup>7</sup>Queen Tyra is said to have died of grief. One account, not Snorra's, states that she herself went with Olaf on the cruise of the *Long Serpent* and was brought a prisoner to Earl



Erik after the famous battle which Olaf lost. She is said to have refused food steadily (as she previously did when the bride of Burislaf) eating only an apple each day until she pined away and died.

But long after Tyra's death, the people in Norway awaited Olaf's return. Many reports were current about him. Some said he had been seen in Jerusalem living as a pious hermit. Norway's famous poet Björnson describes the return of the part of the fleet that sailed out to sea in a poem which freely translated, runs like this:

#### THE FATE OF KING OLAF

"Broad sails skim o'er the northern seas,  
High on the deck in the morning breeze  
Erling of Sola, the Viking strong,  
Over toward Denmark gazes long—  
'Is Olaf, the King, not coming?'"

"Fifty and six great serpents lay  
With folded wings in a sheltering bay;  
The sun-burnt crew toward Denmark gaze,  
No royal ship cleaves the gathering haze—  
'Is Olaf, the King, not coming?'"

"Another dawn and a day pass by;  
No sign of that mast against the sky;  
Their doubts find voice in the moaning tide:  
'Where is our Wonder-Ship, our pride;  
'Is Olaf, the King, not coming?'"

"Still, so still, stand the silent men;  
Up from the sea comes the sound again;  
Each sailor listens with whitened lip:  
'Lost is your pride, your Wonder-Ship,  
And Olaf, the King, is fallen!'"

“And since, through many a hundred year,  
Ships of the North are wont to hear  
On moonlight nights, from the waves, high-tossed,  
The saga-song of a fair ship lost—  
Of Olaf, a hero—fallen.”

## XVIII

### AFTER WORD

**D**ID you hear the singer?  
Pray draw closer, friend.

It is indeed a great hall, and the night is cold outside.

Close the door. . . . See! We crossed seven centuries on the threshold.

The firelight sends forth a cheery welcome and bids us come nearer. It glints on the shield and weapons along the walls until they seem molded of living flame; it brings out the golden tints in the tapestries. It shows us many tables covered with fine linen and the remains of a feast. Servants are passing among the guests with finger-bowls and napkins. Too bad we missed that part of the entertainment!

But who sits there on the High Seat, the chair with the carved pillars? It must be the great King Haakon.

At his right sit his highest church dignitaries.

Over the chair to his left a costly fur robe is thrown and there sits Margaret, his lovely queen. Near by are her handmaidens and the abbesses. The place is thronged with courtiers, guests, retainers, lackeys and serving men, and there is a buzz of conversation.



Hark! A clear chord of music ripples on the air; the singer has touched his harp. All are silent for Snorra, the skald from Iceland, is about to entertain the company.

Let us draw near.

To the accompaniment of chords, strange and stirring, soft and sweet, we glide back through the ages to the dim beginnings of time. He is describing the advance of a horde of people out of the mysterious East, across the plains of Scythia to find a home in the Northland. The tale is tinged with fable; gods and giants mingled with mortals who sometimes themselves seem more than mortal, but every word is another filament to the fairy web of romance he is weaving.

Now the tale is less visionary. He is singing of the sons of Frey,—real men who are building kingdoms and real women who inspire or hinder them in their work—Harald of the Fair Hair, the noble Gyda, King Haakon the Good, Gunhild, the Witch-Queen.

The guests are enthralled; the great King Haakon, holding a goblet, forgets to drink. Snorra is conjuring up his own forefathers whose proud and ancient name he bears.

The singer strikes a martial tone; there is a vision of ships in the air, two glistening lines of dragon-prowed battle-ships. See, they are closing

in on one another. Darkness falls over them; Tor's chariot rumbles through the air—the Jom Vikings have been defeated. Their heads are to be cut off!

A crash! Everybody starts. What was it, a falling head? No, only the logs in the mighty fireplace. The dying embers leap again to life casting a rosy glow on the face of the queen who is listening, entranced, horrified. Such a relief! The generous-hearted Earl Erik is pardoning the prisoners.

The pageant passes. More and more forms are conjured forth by the singer until the great hall is peopled with shapes,—gigantic shadows clustering around us in the gloom.

A powerful earl meets a terrible death in a cave. There is a shriek; the ladies involuntarily tremble. But it was only the wind without, blowing down an ice-bound valley.

You and I have ourselves become a part of this medieval assembly. We follow with bated breath the wanderings of a persecuted princess as she flees from land to land. And we thrill with indignation at the treatment a haughty queen metes out to luckless suitors.

The singer is as great a magician as Odin, and takes us as though on the latter's magic ship, to the far corners of the world,—to golden Aasgaard, to

Sweden's sacred city Upsala, to the wall of Danevirke, to England, Ireland, Normandy, Gardarika, across foggy seas to Iceland with new colonists—and even over the dark Atlantic to “Vinland the Good.”

Now comes the best of all, the fascinating saga-song of King Olaf, the son of Trygva. We follow his footsteps from land to land and his vessels through many a sea. Fortune smiles on him; he represents all that is noble and good—and God.

But the heathen gods have assembled themselves for one last effort against this prince of the line of Frey who has betrayed them, and Sigrid the Haughty, their incarnation, plans Olaf's ruin. A glorious defeat. And the honor of it falls to a brave enemy while Sigrid is cheated of her triumph when Olaf leaps into the sea.

As the dark waters close over that fair head, it seems as though a greater darkness has settled over the listeners; the fire has crumbled to glowing ashes; only a few torches along the walls yield a smoky gleam.

The embers themselves pale gradually, and wink fitfully like sleep-laden eyes. A wreath of smoke curls to the ceiling caressing the dragon-rafters.

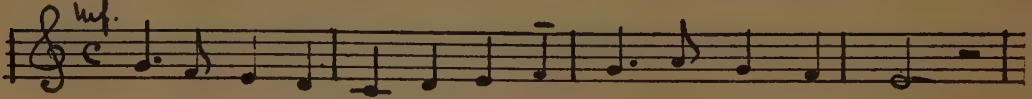
The carved throne, the king, the queen resting a fair cheek thoughtfully against her hand, the crowd of courtiers, all fade from view.



## 342 STORIES OF THE VIKINGS

A gust blows out the torches; the hall is black.  
Only the wind outside continues its melancholy  
wailing.

*Tempo di Marcia*



THE END

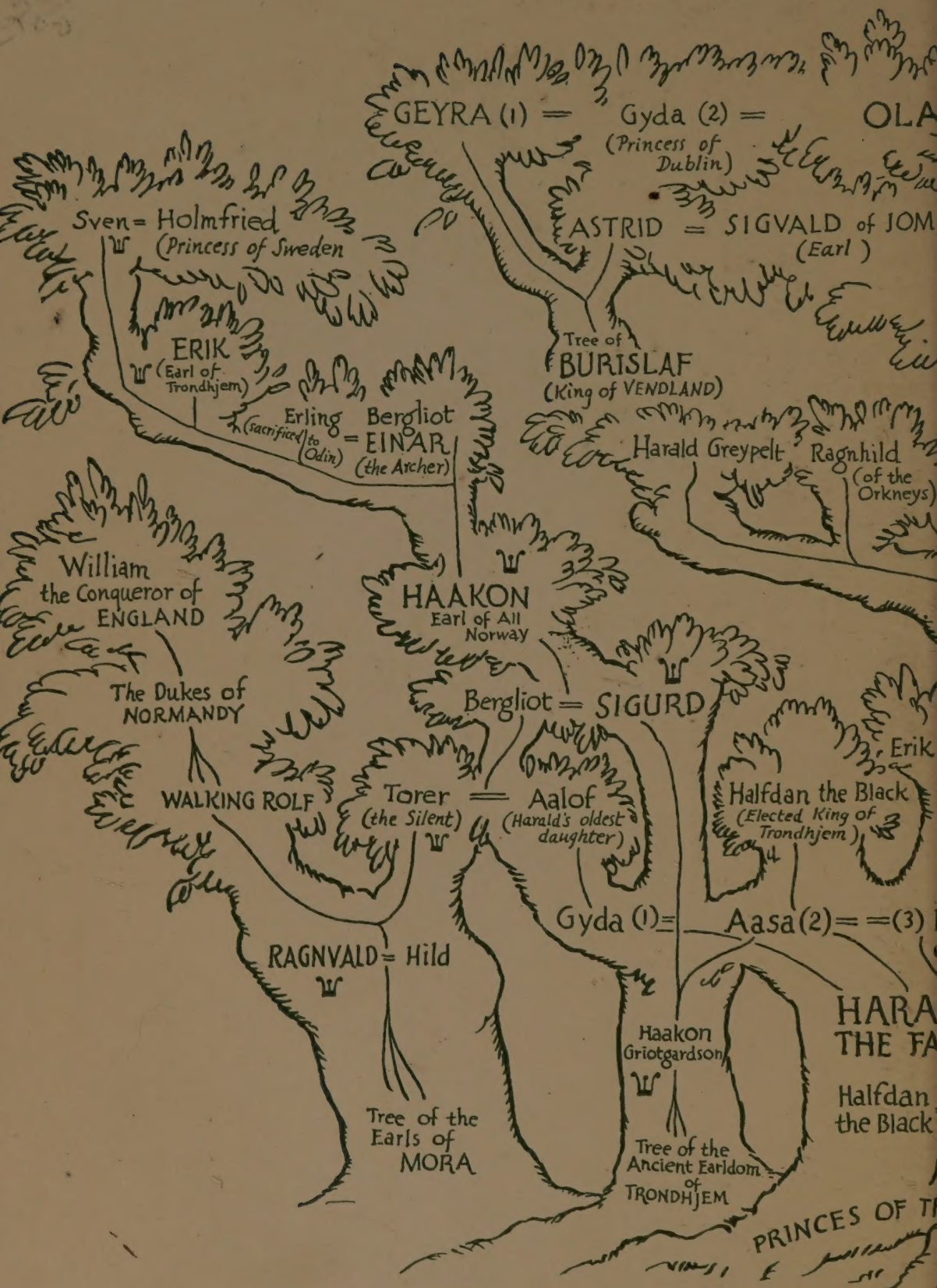
## ERRATA

- 67, line 15, "from the word" should be "form the word."
- 129, line 9, "poisened" should be "poisoned."
- 159, line 17, "son of another." Omit "another."
- 164, line 1, "grandfather" should be "father."
- 184, note seven should be note eight and vice-versa.
- 197, line 21, "boom" should be "boon."
- 256, line 17, "convoys" should be "envoys."
- 267, line 11, insert the word "face" after "kind."
- 291, line 27, "unnecessary" should be "necessary."
- 316, line 15, "Christiandom" should be "Christendom."
- 333, line 20, "worse" should be "worst."



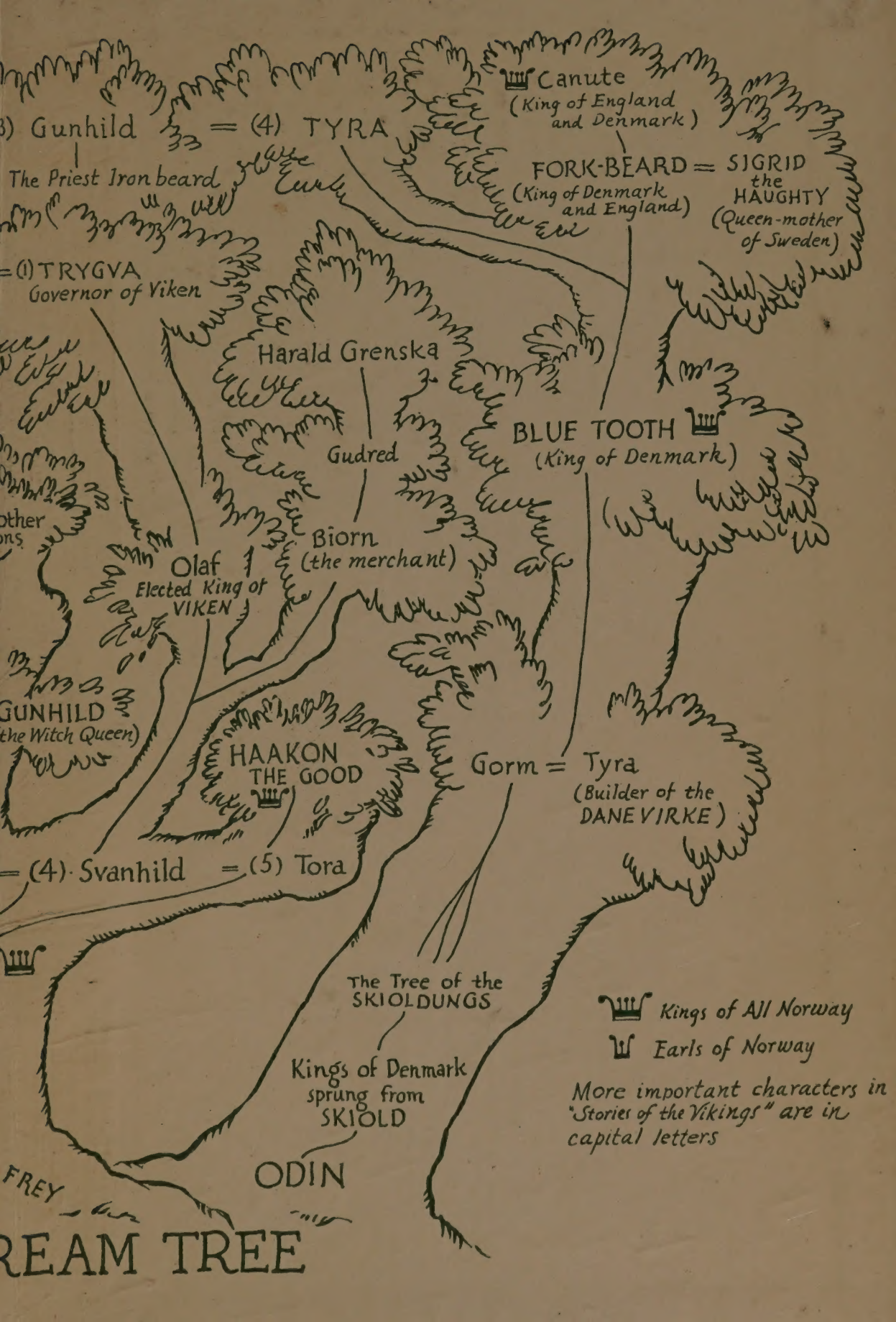






QUEEN RAGNHILD





Gunhild = (4) TYRA

The Priest Iron beard

(1) TRYGVA  
Governor of Viken

Harald Grensa

Gudred

Biorn  
(the merchant)

Olaf  
Elected King of  
VIKEN

GUNHILD  
the Witch Queen

HAAKON  
THE GOOD

Gorm = Tyra  
(Builder of the  
DANEVIRKE)

(4) Svanhild = (5) Tora

The Tree of the  
SKIOLDUNGS

Kings of Denmark  
sprung from  
SKIOLD

ODIN

FREY

REAM TREE

Kings of All Norway

Earls of Norway

More important characters in  
"Stories of the Vikings" are in  
capital letters



